DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 335 846	EC 300 588

AUTHOR	Allan, Julie; And Others
TITLE	Off the Record: Mainstream Provision for Pupils with Non-Recorded Learning Difficulties in Primary and Secondary Schools. SCRE Project Report No. 23 .
INSTITUTION	Scottish Council for Research in Education.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-947833-51-X
PUB DATE	Mar 91
NOTE	111p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Scottish Council for Research in Education, 15 St. John St., Edinburgh EH8 8JR, Scotland, United Kingdom.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Gifted; Handicap Identification; Learning Disabilities; Learning Problems; *Mainstreaming; Parent Participation; *Special Needs Students; Student Needs; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Expectations of Students; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS	*Scotland

ABSTRACT

This final report of a 2-year research project examines how the needs of pupils with non-recorded learning difficulties were identified and met in the mainstream schools of one region in Scotland. Non-recorded pupils were defined as those pupils who were identified as experiencing learning difficulty but whose difficulties were not pronounced, specific, or complex enough to warrant the opening of a record of need. Data were collected through interviews with 59 secondary staff, case studies of 4 secondary schools, interviews with 45 primary school staff and parents, case studies of 3 primary schools, and interviews with 14 Regional officials. Eight key questions posed by a 1978 report titled "The Education of Pupils with Learning Difficulties in Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland" formed a conceptual framework for examining the data. Findings are analyzed in chapters with the following titles: "Teachers' Conceptualisations of Pupils with Learning Difficulties," "Identifying Pupils with Learning Difficulties," "Meeting the Needs of Pupils with Learning Difficulties," "The Role of Learning Support in the Classroom," "Support for Schools: Parental and Professional," and "More Able Pupils." An appendix contains a summary of the Report of the Working Party on Children with Learning Difficulties. (15 references) (JDD)

****
*   Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made   *
*   from the original document.   *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

ED335846

Off the Record: Mainstream Provision for Pupils with Non-Recorded Learning Difficulties in Primary and Secondary Schools

Julie Allan
Sally Brown
Pamela Munn

SCRE
PROJECT
REPORTS

2

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

300588

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Scottish Council for Research in Education
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Off the Record: Mainstream Provision for Pupils with Non-Recorded Learning Difficulties in Primary and Secondary Schools

Julie Allan
Sally Brown
Pamela Munn

The Scottish Council for Research in Education

SCRE Project Report No 23

©The Scottish Council for Research in Education, March 1991

ISBN 0 947833 51 X

Report arising from the *Mainstream Provision for Pupils with Non-Recorded Learning Difficulties in Primary and Secondary Schools* project (reference TRH/2/16) funded by the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) between October 1988 and September 1990.

note:
SCRE aims to make documents arising from its work widely available where possible. Reports and papers in the Project Report Series are not specially prepared for publication and are generally reproductions of these documents as they were presented to the sponsor or advisory committee. In any citation it may be useful to cite the name and reference number (where available) of the research project concerned.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Scottish Council for Research in Education.

Printed by the Scottish Council for Research in Education, 15 St John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR

CONTENTS

Page

PREFACE i

1 POLICY FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH 1
  Scotland 3
  One Scottish Region 4
  Research aims 5
  The research approach 6
  Data collection and analysis 10
  Provision for pupils with learning difficulties - The HMI perspective 11

2 TEACHERS' CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF PUPILS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES 16
  Pupils with short term difficulties 16
  Non-recorded pupils with enduring difficulties 21
  Recorded pupils 28
  Learning difficulties and expectations of what pupils can achieve 29
  Summary 30

3 IDENTIFYING PUPILS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES 32
  Identification in primary school 32
  Transition from primary to secondary 33
  Observation 35
  Standardised tests 35
  Educational Psychologists 37
  Summary 37

4 MEETING THE NEEDS OF PUPILS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES 39
  Short term difficulties 39
  Meeting the needs of pupils with enduring difficulties 44
  Meeting the needs of recorded pupils 52
  Summary 55

5 THE ROLE OF LEARNING SUPPORT IN THE CLASSROOM 57
  Learning support in secondary classrooms 57
  Co-operative teaching 58
  Learning support in primary classrooms 67
  Summary 69

6 SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS: PARENTAL AND PROFESSIONAL 71
  Parents 71
  Professional support 80
  In-service for learning support staff and mainstream staff 82
  Summary 83

7 MORE ABLE PUPILS 85
  Identification of more able pupils in the secondary 85
  Meeting the needs of the more able in the secondary 87
  More able pupils in the primary 89
  Regional initiatives 90
  Summary 90

8 CONCLUSIONS 91
Issues arising from the HMI report 1978 91
Issues arising from the research 97
In conclusion 100

REFERENCES 102

APPENDIX: REPORT OF THE WORKING PARTY ON CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES (Summary) 103

LIST OF TABLES

1.1 SECONDARY STAFF INCLUDED IN FIRST ROUND OF INTERVIEWS 7

1.2 SECONDARY SCHOOL CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS 8

1.3 PRIMARY SCHOOL SAMPLE 9

1.4 REGIONAL INTERVIEWS 10

2.1 SHORT TERM DIFFICULTIES IDENTIFIED BY PRIMARY STAFF 18

2.2 ENDURING DIFFICULTIES IDENTIFIED BY PRIMARY STAFF 22

2.3 ENDURING DIFFICULTIES IDENTIFIED BY SECONDARY STAFF 22

5.1 LESSONS OBSERVED IN THE CASE STUDY SCHOOLS 59

PREFACE

This is a final report arising from a two year research project which commenced in October 1988. The project focused on how the needs of pupils with non-recorded learning difficulties were identified and met in the mainstream schools of one Scottish Region. We report here on our findings from the primary and secondary schools in the context of the Region's policy of integration and of the wider issues surrounding mainstream education which have been the focus of much debate in recent years. Specifically, we explore the nature of the learning difficulties encountered and where staff saw these as having their origin. We also consider the kind of curriculum which was thought to be on offer for pupils with different kinds of needs and examine the subsequent professional demands this has placed on both learning support staff and subject teachers.

We wish to express our sincere thanks to many people for their support throughout the project. The Scottish Office Education Department provided the grant and we are most grateful to them for this. We stress, however, that the views expressed here are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Department or by SCRE. We were fortunate to have been guided through the legislation and the literature on Special Educational Needs by Dr George Thomson and Miss Jean Lawson, who were consultants to the project. Members of the Regional Psychological Service also gave us helpful advice, particularly in the early stages of the project, and generously provided office accomodation and administrative support. The primary and secondary school staff participated in the interviews with enthusiasm and perceptiveness and we thank them wholeheartedly for the valuable insights into their practice which they afforded us. We are particularly grateful to staff in the four secondary and three primary schools who welcomed us back to conduct the case studies and to the parents who agreed to be interviewed. Our thanks go also to Anne Beer, Janette Finlay, Jennie Jackson, and Amanda Evans, who helped to produce the report in its final form. Finally, we are indebted to our project advisory committee, chaired by Dr George Thomson, who shared in our excitement in the project and provided constructive advice and support.

1

POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR THE RESEARCH

Legislation is a key strategy for bringing about social change. By itself, of course, legislation does not immediately change individual attitudes and practices. For example, the Race Relations Act (1981) has not ended individual acts of discrimination but as Hegarty (1990) has argued legislation can:

> articulate national policy, secure resources for implementing it, empower reformers by highlighting divergence of practice from policy and bring about attitudinal change.
>
> (p.17)

In the United Kingdom the Warnock Report (1978) formed the basis of the Education Acts of 1981, which established statutory provision to meet pupils' special educational needs. What kind of social change did the Act promote? There were two interrelated and radical aspects. The first of these was a new conceptualisation of special educational needs; the second was the integration of all pupils with special educational needs into mainstream schools. We consider briefly each of these below.

The Report suggested that the traditional nine categories of pupil handicap be abandoned in favour of a more positive continuum of special educational needs and that these be encapsulated in three broad categories of moderate, severe and profound learning difficulty. The notion of a continuum was important as it implied no cut off point segregating pupils. They simply had different kinds of education needs. This conceptualisation of need was in line with thinking which saw handicap - not as a medical but as an educational condition, summed up recently by Franklin (1987) as 'nothing more than unexplained underachievement'. In the report, however, it was suggested that the use of the term handicapped 'conveys nothing of the type of educational help, and hence of provision that is required'. The conceptualisation of special educational needs as a continuum implied that a far greater proportion of pupils than hitherto would be seen as experiencing learning difficulty. In the report it was suggested that twenty per cent of the school population would experience learning difficulties at some point in their education and this is now accepted as conventional wisdom. The majority of pupils within Warnock's estimate of twenty per cent, however, would have difficulties which had not, in the past, been classified even as moderate, and these pupils would normally have attended mainstream schools. Many of these pupils would have been regularly extracted from their classroom to work with a remedial teacher, often in some remote corner of the school. The Report did not make any specific recommendations about how the needs of these pupils should be met in the future. It was implied, however, that they should also be educated within the mainstream classroom.

As we shall see below, Warnock's conceptualisation of special educational needs as a continuum is not universally shared by teachers. Our evidence suggests that teachers continue to see pupils with 'special educational needs' as those with moderate, severe or profound learning difficulties; pupils with physical disabilities such as hearing or visual impairment also fall into this category. Pupils with less significant problems, however, tend to be referred to generally as 'pupils with learning difficulties'. In our view, this is not simply a semantic point. It has implications for such matters as the kinds of difficulties teachers think are capable of remediation, the nature and extent of help pupils receive and, indeed, the kinds of professional expertise viewed as necessary to meet the pupils' needs.

The second theme in the Report was that of the integration of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream schools. Warnock identified three forms of integration - locational, social and functional - in ascending order of importance. At minimum, provision for children with special needs should not be geographically distinct from provision for mainstream children. More demandingly, there could be opportunities for mainstream and special needs children to mix socially, in the playground, or in extra curricular activities. At best, mainstream and special needs children would be educated together, pursuing the same curriculum goals and experiencing the same set of activities. How the needs of children classified as having 'special educational' needs can be met most effectively continues to be hotly debated, especially in the context of the national curriculum. Many writers have pointed out that the emergence of a state school system in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the explicit aim of providing a general education for all, was paralleled by the systematic exclusion of a number of pupils from this system by the provision of special schools (eg Tomlinson 1985, Barton and Tomlinson 1984, Galloway 1985). Arguments about social justice and morality will be fuelled by the national curriculum which statutorily entitles all pupils in state schools to exposure to a common set of experiences, activities and knowledge.

While legislation is often a prerequisite of bringing about a change in practice it by no means guarantees change. In education policy this is particularly the case. The work of Fullan (1982), Havelock (1975), MacDonald and Walker (1976) and McIntyre (1985), for instance, all points to the difficulties of changing practice either at school or classroom levels. In particular, these authors point to the inherent difficulties of centre-periphery approaches to innovation, where a central authority tries to impose change on the grassroots. Previous research suggests that mainstream teachers need to have a sense of ownership of innovations for them to be successful.

Despite the continuing debate both about the conceptualisation of special educational needs as a continuum and the effectiveness of integration as a strategy for meeting special needs, the principle of integration is one that seems to have been adopted in many education systems such as the USA, Europe, and Australia. In different countries, however, the framework for achieving mainstream provision has developed quite distinctively. We are concerned here with the way things have gone in Scotland.

Scotland

The Warnock Report was one of two documents which had a major influence on provision in Scotland. It directly influenced the Education (Scotland) Act 1981, although the categorisation of special educational need was rather different from that enshrined in the English legislation. In Scotland the categorisation was in terms of 'pronounced, specific or complex educational needs such as require continuing review'. Equally influential, if not more so, was the report of HM Inspectorate, *The Education of Pupils With Learning Difficulties in Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland* (1978). The report, in contrast to the 1981 Act, focused on those pupils experiencing learning difficulties who were already in mainstream schools. It identified the school curriculum as the source of their learning difficulties and purported to consider practical matters such as curriculum, assessment, teaching methods and transition between primary and secondary sectors in meeting their needs. The HMI Report was a significant departure from conventional thinking about pupils with learning difficulties. By locating the source of difficulty in the school rather than the pupil, it advocated a move away from a model of pupils deficits to a consideration of school and teacher deficits. Indeed the report was particularly critical of remedial education and what it perceived as the existing practice of meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties - extraction from the mainstream classroom. We return to the HMI report at the end of this chapter as providing a framework for the areas of mainstream provision viewed as in need of reform. For the moment, our concern is the more general one of the provisions of the 1981 Education (Scotland) Act.

Aspects of the Warnock Report and of the HMI Report were enshrined in the Education (Scotland) Act 1981 (following the 1981 Education Act for England and Wales). Special provision was subject to the conditions set out in a Record of Needs, a legal document which an education authority could open on a child whose needs were regarded as pronounced, specific or complex such as require continuing review and which could not be met through normal educational provision. A Record of Needs is opened after a multidisciplinary assessment of the child, involving at least the headteacher, an educational psychologist and a medical practitioner, in consultation with the child's parents. It contains a statement of the child's needs and how, in general terms, these are to be met. The main significance of a Record of Need is the resources which might come to the school as a consequence, in the form of additional learning support staff, auxiliary staff or equipment such as a phonic ear for a child with hearing impairment or a concept keyboard to aid cognition. The Regional Authority is legally bound to make provision in accordance with the Record, providing it has sufficient resources to do so. The Record of Needs is subject to continuing review and, two years before the end of compulsory schooling, a Future Needs Assessment is undertaken in liaison with the further education college, the department of social work and the careers officer, in order to plan for the final two years of the pupil's formal education.

In recent years, Regional Authorities in Scotland have moved towards the formulation of a policy of integration of pupils with special educational needs and learning difficulties. This, however, has occurred at different rates and to varying degrees. The research reported here focuses on policy and provision in one Scottish Region.

One Scottish Region

In one particular Region in Scotland, a general policy for the integration into mainstream schools and classrooms of as many as possible of the children with special educational needs and learning difficulties has been in operation since 1983. This followed the publication of a report by a regional working party on children with learning difficulties which was set up in 1981 to respond to the Act and to consider all aspects of provision. Before then, as in other local authorities, provision for such pupils was made through special schools or special classes within mainstream schools. Remedial education had been the main way of addressing the needs of pupils with learning difficulties, but the working party accepted the HMI view of the inappropriateness of such practices. The group recommended that children with recorded moderate learning difficulties be integrated into mainstream schools, and that special schools and classes should be replaced by learning centres within the schools. The concept of the learning centre was not spelled out in the regional policy document. It was suggested, however, that pupils should be withdrawn from the mainstream to the learning centre "as and when necessary". Children with non-recorded learning difficulties, the group suggested, should be educated within the mainstream classroom, with appropriate support.

The Region's Psychological Service was given total responsibility for the management of resources in respect of special educational needs and learning difficulties. This involved co-ordinating the administration of the Record of Needs, chairing Review meetings, overseeing the provision for non-recorded pupils and organising in-service training. School staffing complements were allocated by the adviser for pupils with learning difficulties, who was also a member of the Regional Psychological Service. Staffing complements were calculated on a formula which involved the number of recorded pupils in the school, and the school's estimate of the number of pupils with non-recorded learning difficulties.

There were approximately 118 recorded pupils of primary school age and 100 of secondary age whom staff in the service referred to generally as pupils with special educational needs; twelve of these pupils were being educated in a special school and others were in mainstream primary and secondary schools throughout the Region. Estimates of the non-recorded population, made by various members of secondary school staff and regional officials tended to be around eighteen to twenty per cent, although in some deprived areas the figures were thought to be closer to thirty per cent. Staff in the primary schools suggested that as many as forty or fifty percent experienced learning difficulties of one kind or another. There was much optimism, however, that many of these pupils would overcome their difficulties. A smaller proportion, it was thought, would have difficulties which were enduring, requiring continuing support. Anyone making such estimates has to grapple with the question of 'What counts as a learning difficulty?'

Inevitably, both mainstream and learning support staff have experienced a major change in their professional roles. Mainstream staff continue to have to meet the needs of pupils with a wide range of abilities. However, the range has been extended with the inclusion of recorded pupils in their classrooms. Furthermore, the apparent official discouragement of the extraction of non-recorded pupils with learning difficulties from mainstream classrooms implies a new relationship between mainstream and learning support staff. The Region has provided extensive in-service courses for learning support staff and interestingly two different award-bearing courses have been established in Scotland. One of these is for staff supporting recorded children, the Diploma in Special Education Needs (Dip SEN) and the other for staff supporting non-recorded children, the Diploma in Special Educational Needs, Non-Recorded. Most of the promoted staff in the schools' learning support departments had obtained one or other of these qualifications through courses planned jointly by the Region and a College of Education. One of the topics of these courses, unsurprisingly, concerned the relationship between mainstream and learning support staff. In general, the emphasis was on the role of learning support staff as a consultant to mainstream staff, advising on the appropriateness of curriculum materials, for instance, and performing an educative role, as well as being involved in co-operative teaching in the classroom. Thus, the Region's policy on integration posed considerable challenges for all its staff both in the identification of both recorded and non-recorded, and in the meeting of needs in mainstream schools and classrooms.

This was the policy background against which the research took place. What were the research aims and how were these approached? It is to these questions we now turn.

Research Aims

Policy and practice in respect of **recorded** pupils has been the focus of other Scottish research in recent years (Thomson, Riddell and Dyer 1984). Our primary concern was with **non-recorded** pupils, those pupils who were identified as experiencing learning difficulty but whose difficulties were not pronounced, specific or complex enough to warrant the opening of a record of need. In particular we had three main aims:

- to explore what counted as a learning difficulty
- to understand how mainstream teachers, learning support teachers and others perceived their responsibilities in meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties
- to explore regional staff's perceptions of the effectiveness of the policy on integration.

We consider each of these aims in more detail below.

Identification of Needs

Our interest in the identification of pupils having learning difficulties encompassed a number of questions. We wanted to know not only what counted as a learning difficulty, but, also, whether there were shared perceptions of difficulties. Did learning support and mainstream staff perceive learning difficulties in the same way? Specifically was there acceptance of the notion that the locus of difficulties was the curriculum rather than the pupil? Alternatively, was the idea of pupil deficits one that made sense to teachers and helped them in their planning? Were pupils' difficulties viewed as capable of amelioration? Did teachers set the same goals for pupils with learning difficulties and 'ordinary' pupils? As well as questions about conceptualisations of difficulties we were interested in more prosaic matters such as the procedures for identifying pupils with learning difficulties and the number of pupils identified as experiencing learning difficulties, recorded and non-recorded. In Chapters 2 and 3, we report our findings on these areas.

Meeting of Needs

In addition to the identification of needs, we wished to explore the strategies used by staff to meet the needs of both recorded and non-recorded pupils. However, we wished to go beyond a description of such strategies to an exploration of the professional relationship between mainstream and learning support staff and the assumptions underpinning these. We were also interested in other kinds of support available to staff. Within schools we wished to explore whether, and in what ways, senior management facilitated the meeting of needs of pupils experiencing difficulties. Outwith schools we were interested in in-service provision and in the support available from Regional personnel such as the educational psychologists and advisers. The extent to which parents were involved in meeting pupils' needs was a further area we wished to explore. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 concern these matters.

General Policy

Given that it was five years since the implementation of the Region's policy of integration, we hoped to explore the staff's perceptions of the effectiveness of the policy and whether changes, if any, were viewed as desirable. We should make it clear, however, that our primary task was **not** to evaluate the Region's policy. As will be evident from the chapters which follow, the main emphasis has been on understanding how pupils' learning difficulties are identified and met and on the assumptions underlying these processes, and to consider policy implications in that context.

The Research Approach

The research focused on the perceptions of a range of teachers, parents and education authority officials on the areas outlined above. Broadly similar strategies were adopted in secondary and primary schools but we report them separately for the sake of clarity.

Secondary Schools

Data collection took place in two main phases. In the first of these, an initial broad sweep was made of all 16 of the Region's secondary schools to build up a general picture of approaches to the identification and meeting of needs and of perceptions of the effectiveness of the Region's policy. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in each school with the principal teacher of learning support, an assistant learning support teacher if in post, a member of senior management and one mainstream teacher. Table 1.1 gives details.

Table 1.1 Secondary staff included in first round of interviews

Subject	Number
English	4
Mathematics	3
Science	3
Computing	1
Modern Languages	1
Music	1
Home Economics	1
History	1
Geography	1
Assistant Head/Depute	16
Principal Teacher of Learning Support	16
Learning Support Teacher	11
Total	**59**

As far as mainstream staff were concerned, we focused predominantly on English, mathematics and science teachers. These subject areas are traditionally targeted by learning support staff as needing special help. The other subjects were included in an effort to obtain some breadth in our data and to alert us to less obvious, subject specific, difficulties.

The second phase of our work in secondary schools involved four case studies of schools using contrasting approaches either in the identification or in the meeting of needs. As far as the identification of the needs of pupils with learning difficulties was concerned, the contrast was between a school using **systematic observation of pupils** by learning support staff and a school using **standardised tests.** Our second pair of schools provided contrasting approaches to meeting needs. One school had made a particular effort to **involve parents** in helping their children and in the other **special provision for the more able** had been developed. Although it was their contrasting approaches to identifying or meeting special needs which led to the selection of the case-study schools, we continued to explore our three broad areas of enquiry in each. Thus although a school had been chosen because of its distinctive approach to the identification of needs, we continued to explore teachers' views on meeting needs and on Regional policy.

As well as inviting staff in each of the four schools to discuss their approaches to identifying and meeting needs, we attempted to examine, in greater depth, two specific strategies for meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties: the use of differentiated curriculum materials and co-operative teaching. These had emerged as the strategies most generally used across the Region's secondary schools. In each of the four case-study schools, we interviewed a teacher using commercially produced differentiated materials (typically the Kent Mathematics Project) and one using materials produced in the school. We interviewed a mainstream teacher involved in co-operative teaching and one who was not, to try and understand contrasting perspectives on this approach.

A sample of guidance staff was also included in each case-study, as it became apparent that these teachers could be involved in meeting the needs of pupils experiencing short-term learning difficulties. In this context learning support staff in the case-study schools, who had been interviewed in phase one, were interviewed a second time. We wanted to explore their perceptions of short-term difficulties and of any distinctive approaches to identifying or meeting the needs of pupils experiencing such difficulties. Finally, we interviewed a small sample of parents of children with learning difficulties in each of the case-study schools, including a few parents of recorded children. A summary of our interview sample in the case-studies is given in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Secondary School Case-Study Interviews

Category	Number
Learning Support Staff	8
Mainstream Staff	17
Guidance Staff	7
Parents	14
Total	**46**

Primary Schools

A similar approach was adopted in the primary schools. We began with a broad sweep of twelve schools throughout the Region. In these schools we interviewed the headteacher, the learning support teacher, a P4 or P5 teacher and, in one school, a teacher of the hearing impaired. In some of the smaller schools, however, with only one or two teachers, it was not possible to obtain this sample. In many cases the learning support teacher was peripatetic and interviews had to be planned around the times the teachers were in the school.

As with the secondary schools, our initial general phase was followed by case-studies, this time of three schools offering interesting and contrasting approaches to the identification and meeting of needs. In one school pupils with learning difficulties were identified **within the nursery** attached to the primary schools. Additionally **all pupils were screened at P4 and P7**. This same school also had an interesting approach to meeting needs. It had **special**

provision for pupils with behavioural difficulties and **involved parents** in this process. In the second school, **recorded children with hearing impairment were integrated into a mainstream classroom.** Almost all the pupils and staff were able to communicate using sign language to varying degrees. We were particularly interested in how this related to the ways in which staff tried to meet the needs of pupils with non-recorded difficulties. The third school we chose as a case-study was typical of many primary schools in the Region in the ways it identified and met needs.

In each of the three primary schools we continued to address our original research questions, albeit with a greater number and wider range of individuals. We also put emphasis on issues which were emerging from the analysis of our data from both primary and secondary schools. For example, we asked staff to comment on the origins of the learning difficulties they had talked about, to discuss the kind of curriculum on offer and to explore and contrast the professional roles of the mainstream and learning support staff. Our interviews in each case-study primary school included a teacher of infants, middle and upper primary, where staff numbers allowed. We interviewed one learning support teacher twice and a teacher of the hearing impaired. Four parents of pupils with non-recorded difficulties were interviewed as was one parent of a recorded child. We observed some lessons informally, and looked briefly at some of the learning materials in use. Details of the total primary school sample are given in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 Primary school sample

Category	Number
Learning Support Staff	10
Teachers of Hearing Impaired	2
Mainstream Staff	15
Headteachers	13
Parents	5
Total	**45**

Regional Interviews

In order to complete the picture and to address some of the broader policy questions, we interviewed a number of Regional officials within the directorate, advisory service and psychological service. Table 1.4 gives details.

Table 1.4 Regional interviews

Category	Number
Directorate	3
Psychologists	9
Advisers	2
Total	14

Data Collection and Analysis

In our experience, it is always difficult for teachers to talk about their own classroom action. Much of their practice is spontaneous and routine and they are rarely called upon to make it explicit. Consequently, the interviewer often obtains generalisations which provide limited insight and may reflect what the teacher thinks the researcher wants to hear. Our approach to the interviews was to ask staff to identify specific examples of one or two pupils whom they knew to have experienced learning difficulties and to tell us about how they tried to meet their needs. We then invited them to generalise about their practice, for example, by saying, "So would that be typical of how you try to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties?" We adopted this method with all school staff and with educational psychologists. In the interviews with Directorate officials, we asked them to select a school rather than pupils as the specific example. This approach generated interview data which was rich and interesting. Nevertheless, it has to be recognised that this aspect of data gathering has its limitations: what staff say they do can differ from what actually happens, not necessarily because of any intention to mislead. Classrooms are busy, highly interactive places and teachers necessarily select what seems to them to be salient about their practice. Unfortunately, our resources did not allow us to complement our interview study with systematic observation in classrooms. We should mention that all our interviews were tape-recorded and lasted, on average, about an hour.

In considering how to analyse our interview data, we sought some means of teasing out not only the concepts which the teachers used in thinking about learning difficulties but also the links they made between those concepts. To achieve this we looked for linkages or 'threads' relating the difficulties which staff identified, the evidence for those difficulties, their assumed causes and the strategies used to address them. Threads were traced only where staff were definite about the links. For example, when a teacher said, "The boy has reading difficulties; the Macmillan test showed him to have a reading age of 10; I give him the guided readers, which he can get through", we recognised a thread between the difficulty, evidence and a strategy but no statement of cause. The coding categories for the threads were developed according to how the staff talked about them in order that we could ground our analysis, as far as possible, in their perceptions of their own practice.

The nature of our research design and methods has made it possible to offer a fairly detailed picture of the teachers' perceptions of the nature of learning difficulties and what they saw as the most effective ways of meeting the needs of pupils experiencing learning difficulties. The number and nature of our sample does not allow us to generalise among the broad population of teachers. However, the emergence of patterns in the way the teachers talked about learning difficulties has enabled us to develop three main themes which run through the remaining chapters and to sustain a number of hypotheses about the ways in which teachers address the questions about the education of pupils with learning difficulties. These are in the general areas of:

- Teachers' perceptions of the origin and the nature of learning difficulties and whether these are thought to be amenable to remediation
- Curriculum provision for children experiencing enduring difficulty: essentially we discuss whether these children are set the same mainstream goals as the generality of pupils or are provided with a special curriculum within the mainstream classroom
- The professional status, expertise and the role of learning support staff and their relationships to the subject specific expertise and role of mainstream staff

These themes are summarised and discussed most fully in our final chapter, but are evident throughout the report.

Provision for Pupils with Learning Difficulties - The HMI Perspective

Before moving on to discuss the research and its findings, there is one further aspect of the context in which the teachers were taking account of pupils with learning difficulties that should be addressed. As we mentioned earlier, the Scottish Education Department (1978) published an HMI report entitled *The Education of Pupils with Learning Difficulties in Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland* at about the same time as the Warnock Report, which purported to consider practical matters of the school and classroom (eg curriculum, assessment, methods, transition between sectors, remedial teaching) and 'placed the responsibility for dealing with pupils with learning difficulties firmly in the hands of the schools' (paragraph 4.19). As teachers, schools and local authorities went about implementing the changes which emphasised mainstream provision for those with special educational needs and recognised around twenty per cent of pupils as having enduring learning difficulties, the HMI report was regarded as offering advice and a framework to think about the innovations during the 1980s.

The report was based on HMI visits to mainstream primary and secondary schools, but not to special schools, in the mid-1970s. Its findings were, therefore, clearly relevant to our focus of study, that is non-recorded pupils with learning difficulties in mainstream classes. Although no formal set of recommendations was offered, the report made clear the areas of thinking and practice which HMI believed to be in need of reform. We will look briefly at these and use them to formulate a set of questions which our research findings could help to illuminate. In the final chapter of this report we will return to these issues and consider the changes that have (or have not) come about in these areas over the last decade. We will have something to say then about the influence which the HMI document appears to have had on practice in classrooms and schools.

The first 'fundamental issue to be resolved' was, HMI suggested, the **definition of remedial education.** 'Basic skills of reading and computation' were seen as too narrow. Emphasis was placed on the need to broaden the concept to apply to 'a wider and more diverse range of pupils ... [including] those who have trouble coping with these ideas and concepts ... [and those] whose problems are the result of discontinuity ... [ie] frequent absence or change of school' (paragraph 4.2). We have to ask, therefore

> Has the concept of what counts as a learning difficulty been broadened and applied to a wider range of pupils?

In considering the **responsibility for provision** for pupils with learning difficulties (paragraph 4.3) HMI called for co-operation between class or subject teachers and 'remedial teachers'. The latter had previously carried most of the burden, but the former were now exhorted to take more responsibility for dealing with learning difficulties 'in the class or subject context in which they arise'. Furthermore, Assistant Headteachers in primary schools, and principal teachers, together with the management team under the headteacher in the secondary sector, were seen as essential elements in the co-ordination of remedial education. From a research perspective we ask

> Have class and subject teachers and promoted staff taken a central role, and collaborated appropriately with learning support staff, in providing for pupils with learning difficulties?

Some criticism was voiced in the SED report on the shallowness of **diagnostic techniques** used (paragraph 4.4 and 4.5). Identification and assessment of learning difficulties were seen as too dependent on standardised tests of basic reading and number, as giving little attention to establishing 'the point of onset of difficulty' or uncovering 'deeper problems' (not necessarily educational) which could be the cause of poor performance on basic skills tests, and as sometimes leading to 'adverse effects on [pupils'] whole attitude to school'.

> Have testing/diagnostic techniques developed to the point where they can identify a whole range of learning difficulties, indicate the specific kind of help required and avoid a sense of failure on the part of the pupil?

With regard to the **curriculum**, the report had a variety of criticisms of the practice observed by HMI and a wealth of ambitious goals (paragraphs 4.6 to 4.9) for schools to attend to including the following:

- curriculum aims should be the same for all pupils
- pupils should not all have to study the same things, at the same pace, in the same way
- objectives for pupils should take into account their age, aptitude and ability
- the curriculum must sustain skill and interest and get pupils across the 'plateau of learning'
- demands on pupils for higher skills must be not only appropriate but also sufficiently challenging
- de-contextualised activity, such as routine drilling, should be avoided
- reducing or dropping aspects of the curriculum for individual pupils who require greater provision for the development of basic skills should not be at the expense of enjoyable or creative activities, or those which offer experience of 'success', self-confidence and stimulating variety.

> To what extent has the curriculum offered been able to take account of the demanding programme for development called for by HMI?

In relation to **methods** (paragraph 4.10), an increase in 'discussion' and a combination of class, group and individual methods for both secondary and primary schools were called for. Teachers were advised to tackle 'frankly and with determination' the questions of methodology and differentiation. The need to reduce 'class teaching', the problem of every pupil being asked to work at the level and pace of the majority and the importance of making use of educational technology were all seen as requiring attention.

> Have teaching methods evolved to enable teachers to take account of individual differences among pupils in ways that promote the learning of everyone?

Matters of organisation were seen by HMI as being primarily concerned with avoiding circumstances in which pupils with learning difficulties are 'segregated from other pupils in the school and the whole range of activities available to them' (paragraph 4.11). Such pupils, it was argued, should be taught as far as possible by class or subject teachers with support from remedial teachers. The latter should 'co-operate with the rest of the school staff' and have time 'afforded them to attend staff meetings and opportunities provided for them to talk with class and subject teachers'.

> To what extent has the segregation of pupils with learning difficulties disappeared and have learning support teachers been given the opportunities and resources necessary to collaborate with mainstream colleagues?

HMI expressed the hope that at **transition from primary to secondary school** there should be a full exchange of information including much more detail about 'the problems of individual pupils, particularly those of a curricular nature, and about the types and sources of their difficulties'. Secondary teachers then have to make proper use of this information.

> Is there a full exchange of information between the sectors about pupils with learning difficulties and, if so, how is that information used?

The report explicitly addressed **the roles of Headteachers and remedial specialists.** Headteachers were called upon to exert leadership, ensure school policies made provision for support for pupils with learning difficulties and keep guidance staff informed. Remedial specialists were urged to:

- support pupils who had failed to master basic reading and computation
- act as a consultant to other members of staff
- advise on language across the curriculum
- support pupils who have temporary upsets to progress or return from residential care or special education
- work in classrooms alongside class or subject teachers
- have their contributions co-ordinated by the principal teacher of remedial education
- liaise with agencies such as child guidance services

> To what extent are these tasks reflected in the current practice of learning support teachers and how do Headteachers undertake their leadership role in relation to the curriculum, vocational guidance and communication with parents of pupils with learning difficulties?

It is our intention to provide a commentary in the final chapter on the extent to which what is going on in our sample of schools reflects the aspirations of the HMI report of 1978. We are, however, not setting up those aspirations as an 'ideal' against which to evaluate current practice. Indeed whether the HMI 'ideal' is attainable is debatable. This is not the place to offer a detailed critique of the 1978 document, but it is important to point out a few of its limitations and inconsistencies.

The most obvious problem faced by teachers in reading the HMI report was the abundance of advice it offered at a high level of generality coupled with a virtual absence of any practical guidance on how to overtake its recommendations. In fact we know very little about how to achieve such things as effective and fair differentiation in mixed ability classes or genuine 'group work' in primary and secondary classrooms. Diagnostic procedures, particularly those which probe the underlying causes of failure to achieve, are not readily to hand. Retaining the same aims for all pupils is rarely consistent with promoting different routes to achieve those aims; in practice, different routes invariably lead to different goals.

Although the general rhetoric of the document implied that if schools and teachers would only set about their provision for pupils with learning difficulties in the 'right' way, then those difficulties could be overcome, there was a curious lapse from this optimistic stance. In relation 'to the relatively few pupils who have failed to master the early process of reading and computation', it was asserted that 'Even with intensive help, only a minority of such pupils are likely to make significant progress' (paragraph 4.16). Nowhere, as far as we can see, is the question addressed of how that statement stands with regard to the aim of the same curriculum goals for **all** pupils. How do the teacher and school concurrently avoid a 'special' curriculum for such pupils and segregation **and** a sense of failure in comparison with others? We would not expect the HMI report to have resolved these issues (in total they are probably not open to resolution), but we would criticise it for being written in a style which fails to make explicit the genuine tensions to be faced and the inevitable sacrifices of some desirable goals to be made by teachers as they are exhorted to achieve other (but mutually incompatible) goals.

Finally, there is the matter of the status and role of the learning support staff (or remedial specialists as they were designated in the 1978 text). Although HMI provided a list of tasks which these teachers should undertake, it reflected a 'pick and mix' job much more than a coherent professional role. Liaison with, education of and support for mainstream staff were all emphasised, but the status of a separate remedial department with a principal teacher and the opportunity to develop its own policies and activities was undermined. It is not our intention to support the retention of separate remedial departments, but it is important to make the point that new tasks will not in themselves ensure the satisfaction and sense of ownership that a teacher needs to engage in creative professional activity. While it may be desirable to discontinue the idea of the remedial teacher whose expertise lies in a capability to deal with the least able pupils and help them to achieve the limited goals of a 'special' curriculum, it is also necessary to replace it with something of greater substance than the notion of the learning support teacher who acts as the 'servant' of mainstream staff. In our view, the HMI report left this matter open in a way which could lead to a variety of interpretations of the role of learning support teachers and considerable scope for differences of opinion between them and mainstream staff.

As we shall argue throughout this report, the question of the professional role of learning support staff and the notion of a 'special' curriculum arise repeatedly. The HMI report has provided us with a set of questions which our research findings will address but, despite its undoubted importance in the history of provision for those with learning difficulties in this country, it is itself problematic and so in need of substantial explication. However, that is not something we can take on in this text. Instead, we hope to illuminate some of the conceptual and practical problems of identifying and meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. We begin with the ways in which teachers conceptualised the different kinds of learning difficulties experienced by pupils.

2

TEACHERS' CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF PUPILS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

There have been a variety of estimates about the number of pupils with learning difficulties. Warnock (1978) suggested that one in five pupils experienced learning difficulties and some writers have pointed out that almost **all** pupils at some time or other in their school career have problems of one kind or another. In the primary and secondary schools where the research was carried out there were marked differences in teachers' estimates of the number of pupils experiencing learning difficulties. Primary school teachers suggested that as many as 40 or 50% of pupils experienced difficulties, whereas the figure provided by secondary staff tended to be around 20%. In trying to make sense of such differing perceptions, however, one has to consider the the question of **'What counts as a learning difficulty?'** for those making the estimates.

Our approach to this question was to ask learning support staff, mainstream staff, senior management in primary and secondary schools and secondary guidance staff to think about one or two pupils with learning difficulties, to describe what the difficulties were and to suggest the kinds of evidence which indicated that the pupils were experiencing these difficulties. From these interviews three broad categories of pupils with learning difficulties emerged:

- Pupils with difficulties which were viewed as capable of being resolved
- Pupils whose difficulties were fundamental and enduring
- Pupils whose difficulties were fundamental and enduring and who had a Record of Needs

One striking contrast between the primary and secondary sectors was the optimism displayed by primary staff that many of these pupils would overcome their difficulties with support in the early stages of the primary school. A much smaller proportion than in secondary were viewed as likely to have enduring difficulties, requiring continuing support.

Pupils with short term difficulties

Staff in both primary and secondary sectors reported pupils as experiencing a range of short term difficulties. Several different kinds of difficulties were identified, for example, understanding a particular concept, lack of concentration or specific lapses in class work caused perhaps by a pupil's absence from school. What these difficulties had in common, however, was that they were seen as likely to be overcome by pupils if appropriate help and support was given by the school. There were interesting differences in the ways in which primary and secondary teachers talked about these difficulties, particularly their causes and the kinds of evidence indicating that a difficulty was short term. In general difficulties could be categorised as either cognitive or as social, behavioural and emotional. From time to time, of course, the two kinds of difficulties interacted, so that a young child in primary who had difficulty, let us say, in behaving appropriately might also have difficulty in reading. We turn first to pupils, seen as having short term cognitive difficulties and discuss what these were, how they were identified and the role of mainstream and learning support staff in this process.

Short term cognitive difficulties

In secondary schools short term cognitive difficulties tended to relate to an inability to grasp particular concepts or to perform specific operations in, for example, mathematics or science. The majority of these difficulties were identified by mainstream staff who also took steps to try to resolve them. Helping pupils with short term difficulties, those who 'got stuck' was part of the normal routine of teaching. Staff recognised that, from time to time, their own teaching approach might be causing a difficulty and that curriculum materials might not allow sufficient opportunities for practice of routine operations, for example, in mathematics. The teacher below indicates that teaching methods and language level can cause learning difficulties for pupils:

> I do accept that we often don't think about what will cause kids problems and not just the less able. Things that we say that if we just thought about, we would not make the mistakes.

The implication was that since it might be the teaching approach that was causing the difficulty it was the responsibility of the subject specialist to try to resolve it. For routine difficulties in understanding the subject matter of a discipline, therefore, the mainstream teachers saw themselves as the appropriate people both to diagnose the difficulties and help pupils to overcome them. There were, however, occasions when other teachers could be involved. In particular, guidance staff could be involved especially where the cause of a difficulty was bereavement, divorce or other personal circumstances which were thought to influence the pupil's normal performance in the class. Significantly, learning support staff were rarely involved in the remediation of pupils' short term difficulties. Neither they nor mainstream staff saw this as an appropriate role and this seems to us to raise important questions about the educative role of learning support staff which we consider in more detail in Chapter 5. For the moment, however, our concern is with the identification of pupils' short term learning difficulties. What kinds of cognitive difficulties were identified in the primary schools?

Staff in the primary schools reported pupils as experiencing a range of short term difficulties and appeared confident in distinguishing different kinds of difficulties. Interestingly enough, however, the evidence for these difficulties tended to be general and related to a pupil's performance in the classroom, rather than to the results of any diagnostic tests used. Indeed as Table 2.1 shows, the same kinds of evidence were cited as indicating rather different kinds of difficulties.

Table 2.1 Short Term Difficulties Identified by Primary Staff

Cause	Difficulty	Staff	Evidence
Poor learning style, slow in starting	Reading	All staff	Failure to cope with classwork, work of poor standard, reports from mainstream staff
Poor learning style	General literacy/ language	Learning support and mainstream staff	Failure to cope with classwork, work of poor standard, reports from mainstream staff, low test results
Intrinsic difficulty Teacher's fault, poor materials, absence	Specific concept or operation	Mainstream staff	Failure to cope with work, child has fallen behind
Poor learning style	Concentration	All staff	Failure to cope with classwork, work of poor standard, low test results
Absence	Lapse in classwork	Mainstream staff	Pupil demonstrates knowledge gaps or this is anticipated
Bereavement, divorce, home background	Emotional, social, behavioural difficulties	Mainstream staff and headteachers	Disruptive behaviour, violence, stopping working, child is upset or isolated from class

Staff hoped that with help and support from both the regular class teacher and the learning support staff, most pupils would overcome their difficulties in reading, or numeracy. As one primary learning support teacher commented:

> You just keep plugging away in the hope that it will suddenly click and the child will take off. That's what usually happens, but obviously with some pupils you gradually realise that they're always going to have problems right through the school

Part of the optimism about pupils' being able to overcome difficulties was perhaps due to the inferred causes of such difficulties. They were often attributed to a poor 'learning style' or being 'slow in starting'. Sometimes this was seen as the result of poor parenting, that is parents not encouraging their children to concentrate or teaching them to behave properly. It was often accepted as normal that young children develop at different rates and once inside the institution of the school certain common levels of attainment in basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy would be reached by the majority of the pupils. Whatever the reason for some children being slow in starting, teachers saw it as important to target help at the children experiencing difficulty as early in their school career as possible. This meant that learning support staff tended to concentrate their efforts in infants and middle primary. The teacher below sums up the rationale for this approach:

> She just needed that extra help, just someone to take the time with her and build up her confidence. Now she's pretty well middle of the road, and seems to really enjoy reading but I just wonder, if she hadn't got the help early on, would she now be an average pupil?

Some strategies used to help pupils to overcome difficulties, particularly in the early stages of the primary, conflicted with both regional and national policy guidelines. Pupils were sometimes extracted from the main class to receive intensive help on the grounds that this was the most efficient and effective way for them to catch up.

So far we have been concentrating on the main kinds of short term **cognitive difficulties** identified by teachers in primary and secondary schools. Below we describe some of the behavioural and emotional difficulties identified as short term by staff. Before leaving short term cognitive difficulties it is worth comparing the main similarities and differences between the views of primary and secondary staff. Unsurprisingly, some difficulties, such as with reading, were viewed as short term only by primary staff. Clearly a pupil of 12 or 13 years of age experiencing reading difficulties is in a rather different category from a five or six year old. However, there were some difficulties seen as common across both sectors, most typically those concerning concepts, such as that of time in history or the spatial elements of a contour map in geography. These difficulties were regarded as intrinsic to the subject and the regular class teacher, expected to deal with them as part of the normal business of teaching.

Perhaps the most notable differences between the two sectors were in the inferred causes of difficulties and in the role envisaged for the learning support staff. In the secondary school difficulties were seen as either intrinsic to the subject, as mentioned above, or due to pupil absence or personal circumstances which upset pupils' typical attainments and work patterns. The main responsibilities for overcoming these difficulties were accepted by the mainstream secondary teachers with assistance, as appropriate, from guidance staff. Learning support staff did not feature in helping pupils to overcome short term cognitive difficulties. In the primary schools, in contrast, learning support staff were involved in helping pupils to overcome short term difficulties. We suggest that this was because in the early stages of the primary it was not possible for teachers to predict accurately those pupils who would have enduring as opposed to short term difficulties. Causes of difficulty could be in the home background or simply in differential rates of development of young children. Learning support staff were, therefore, a valuable extra pair of hands in the classroom, providing more intensive support but **essentially the same kind of support as the mainstream teacher.** Indeed the learning support staff sometimes extracted pupils as a way of intensifying support in basic literacy and numeracy skills. They tended to be viewed as having a similar range of skills as mainstream primary staff. In secondary schools, learning support staff were viewed as having different skills from those of the mainstream staff and so were reserved for those pupils seen as most likely to benefit from their skills, pupils with long term difficulties.

Difficulties in general literacy or language and general numeracy were also reported by primary mainstream and learning support staff, indicated by a general failure to cope with classwork or work of a poor standard. Learning support teachers also cited reports from mainstream staff and low test results as evidence of difficulties of this kind; again staff suggested that these difficulties might only be of a short term nature.

Difficulties with a specific concept or operation such as division were identified as commonly occurring by primary and secondary mainstream staff. These had often arisen as a result of absence or through a 'mental block' on the part of the child, and were suggested to the staff by the pupil having fallen behind or failed generally to cope with the work. The majority of these were regarded as capable of being remedied. Other short term difficulties in specific areas of the curriculum were thought to be commonly experienced by pupils of various levels of ability, because of their intrinsic complexity. For example, the concept of time in history, the spatial elements of contour maps in geography and character development within the novel were thought by secondary staff to be recurrent difficulties, indicated by the pupils' general poor performance in a related task. A number of teachers in both primary and secondary schools took the view, expressed in the HMI report, that the curriculum was the source of learning difficulties. We suspect that some of the staff had adopted the 'official line', proselytised by others. In some cases, however, teachers gave examples of difficulties which had arisen through inadequacies in teaching, materials or classroom organisation. One primary teacher, for example, said:

> By and large, I find staff pretty good at differentiation, especially where they're using materials such as SPMG. Yet they often don't do it across the board. They forget that if a child has difficulties in reading, they're going to struggle with the reading in topic work or environmental studies.

The degree of optimism held by primary school staff led them to target the support for pupils experiencing difficulties in the lower primary classes and to adopt strategies which were often successful but which, in some cases, were apparently contrary to regional and national guidelines. As pupils progressed through the primary school, the optimism gradually diminished and it was accepted that the learning difficulties of some pupils would not be resolved. A number of primary learning support staff and headteachers thought that mainstream staff were sometimes precipitate in accepting certain learning difficulties as enduring. As one learning support teacher commented:

> It used to be the case that the infant mistress took the attitude, "You shall not touch" Now it's much better and I'm allowed further and further down the school to catch things as early as possible and hopefully there's a better success rate. It's more the case at the top end of the school that they say, "only if you can spare the time, they're really past it now." By P5, you get the attitude that if they've not done it by now, you're flogging a dead horse. I find that really sad, if you've not made it by the time you've reached 10, you're on the scrap heap.

Some staff, particularly those in the secondary schools, did not always find it easy to specify how the difficulties of particular pupils had been overcome with help. Subject specific difficulties were part of the everyday experiences of the pupils and, as such, were overcome through the teachers' routine classroom actions. Primary staff, on the other hand, tended to be more specific about how they backtracked to the point where the difficulty had emerged, and provided extra practice or intensive work, for example, on phonics.

Short Term Behavioural, Social or Emotional Difficulties

Behavioural difficulties were identified by both class teachers and headteachers in the primary schools with the view that, at least in the early stages of primary, these might be overcome. It seemed that attempts to address these kinds of difficulties could be encompassed within the primary teachers' goals for the pupils, which often included aspects of behaviour or social training. In one of the case study schools, special provision was made for pupils with behavioural difficulties. Some of the pupils had enduring difficulties of this kind, which staff in the school only hoped to keep under control. Others, however, were viewed as having behavioural difficulties, which could be overcome through reinforcement of acceptable ways of behaving. Strategies for managing behaviour, which we report on in Chapter 4, were aimed at preventing this.

Headteachers of primary and secondary schools identified social difficulties, such as relating to peers, indicated by disruptiveness, violent behaviour or isolation in class. They also reported emotional difficulties, arising from personal matters (eg bereavement or divorce) and which were suggested to them by disruptiveness or isolation in class. Many of these were viewed as short term, and were usually dealt with by the headteachers or guidance staff.

Non-Recorded Pupils with Enduring Difficulties

By the later stages of primary school and throughout most of secondary, there appeared to be a consensus among teachers that about twenty percent of the school population were experiencing difficulties which were likely to be enduring. Such a figure was, of course, in line with that suggested by the Warnock Report, but we have no way of knowing whether the teachers' estimates provided an independent measure or simply reiterated a Report which had become part of the fabric of the learning difficulties world. Within the twenty percent of pupils two broad groups were identified: one with cognitive difficulties and the other with behavioural, social or emotional. Frequently difficulties of the two kinds were interrelated.

Enduring Cognitive Difficulties

The level of cognitive difficulty experienced by a number of these pupils was such that learning support staff in both the primary and secondary sectors believed they should have had a Record of Needs. Below we compare the kinds of enduring difficulties identified by primary and secondary teachers.

Table 2.2 Enduring Cognitive Difficulties Identified by Primary Staff

Difficulty	Staff	Evidence
Reading	All staff	Low test results, work of a poor standard, failure to cope with classwork, reports from mainstream staff
Numeracy	Learning support and mainstream staff	Work of a poor standard, failure to cope with classwork, able to do only simple tasks
General low ability	Headteachers	No evidence provided

Table 2.3 illustrates the enduring difficulties identified by secondary staff.

Table 2.3 Enduring Cognitive Difficulties Identified by Secondary Staff

Difficulty	Staff	Evidence
Reading	Mainstream and learning support staff	Low test results, work of a poor standard, failure to cope with classwork, reports from mainstream staff
Writing	All staff	Small amount of work produced, incomplete work, poor syntax, poor spelling, indecipherable text
Numeracy	Learning support staff	Work of a poor standard, failure to cope with classwork, able to do only simple tasks
Spelling	Learning support staff	Low test results, work of poor standard, incorrect work, reversal of letters
General low ability	Mainstream staff and headteachers	No evidence provided
Generally slow	Mainstream staff and headteachers	No evidence provided
Comprehension	Headteachers	Failure to cope with classwork
Concentration	Mainstream staff	Disruptive behaviour, incorrect or incomplete work

Tables 2.2 and 2.3 provide a summary of the cognitive difficulties which teachers in the two sectors saw as affecting the learning of up to one in five children and as unlikely to be resolved during their period of compulsory education. They also identify the kinds of evidence cited as

indicating the presence of such difficulties. One of the striking features of this list is the similarity between the evidence cited for the occurrence of **enduring** problems and that seen as indicating **short-term** difficulties. It seems that the same system of cues applies to both, but the distinction comes in the length of time and the accumulation of evidence over wider areas of the curriculum.

Turning first to the primary schools, all the teachers identified **reading** as a source of a common and enduring difficulty. Evidence for this ranged from results on specific tests indicating a low reading age to statements about an apparent lack of the general ability needed to cope with classwork or to produce work of a good standard. None of the tests used seemed to us to be diagnostic in a fundamental sense. While they might map out in a formative way general areas of strength and weakness, they did not purport to get at the basic causes of the pupils' reading problems. The judgements made by the teachers were relatively 'global' as was the kind of evidence to which they referred; very little in the way of specialist vocabulary was used in discussion of reading difficulties.

Both mainstream and learning support teachers expressed concern about some primary pupils' difficulties in **numerical competence.** Again the evidence was described at a high level of generality and referred to low standards, inability to cope and success on only the simplest of tasks.

The primary headteachers placed substantial emphasis on pupils with **generally low levels of ability.** The notion that pupils had inherent and relatively fixed levels of general ability, which provided a ceiling on their learning and were all too evident by the later years of primary school, was one that appeared to play a major role in the headteachers' thinking about children's learning. It was not surprising that headteachers tended to make more global judgments than other primary teachers and were less likely to provide direct and tangible evidence for their statements; their role was concerned with overarching management matters and in this case was likely to focus on summarising what the other teachers had to say. In contrast, we found that learning support staff were much more task-oriented and so provided us with substantially greater evidence of a concrete kind for the difficulties they perceived their pupils as having; clearly they have more opportunities for compiling evidence from a variety of sources than do headteachers.

Looking now to the secondary sector, the concern expressed about **reading** in the primaries was mirrored in the statements of both subject and learning support teachers in the secondaries. Perhaps even greater emphasis, however, was placed on difficulties in **writing.** All groups of teachers in secondary, but hardly any in primary, reported evidence in the form of meagre or incomplete written work or problems of syntax, spelling and decipherability. **Spelling** was, in itself, a focus of attention for the secondary learning support staff who commented on low test results, inaccuracy, reversal of letters and a generally poor standard or work as evidence for pupils experiencing difficulty. The teachers in this group (but not the secondary subject teachers) like primary teachers, reported evidence of a general nature as indicating problems of **numeracy.**

Perhaps the most striking contrast with the primaries was the frequency with which secondary mainstream (subject) teachers and headteachers referred to pupils as being **generally slow** or of **low ability**. This seemed to correspond to the judgments of the primary staff's perceptions (reported under 'short-term cognitive difficulties' above) of pupils as **slow in starting** but expected to catch up later. On the one hand, the primary teachers, particularly in the lower school, had an essentially optimistic view of overcoming difficulties. On the other hand, the secondary staff tended to perceive pupils as having fixed amounts of innate ability, and where these amounts were inadequate they caused difficulties in reading, writing and numeracy which were unlikely to be amenable to remediation. Mainstream staff in the secondaries tended to see these difficulties in terms of a deficit in the competences which are pre-requisites for learning in their subject area. In this vein, they also cited **inability to concentrate** as one such pre-requisite and described disruptive behaviour and failure to complete work as evidence. Curiously it was the secondary headteachers rather than the subject teachers who referred to **failures in comprehension**, evidenced by an inability to cope with classwork, as a final learning difficulty.

The individual pupils whom teachers chose to talk about were sometimes seen as having **multiple** enduring difficulties. One secondary learning support teacher, for example, gave the following account of a pupil:

> He appears to have great difficulty actually putting written work onto paper. It's more than just a physical problem. He reverses letters and his spelling's not good, so it becomes difficult for him to write because of his spelling. He was a very, not hyperactive child, but he certainly lacked concentration in the primary. He was very unsettled; he was a bit clumsy; there were lots of indicators that he wasn't doing as well as other pupils. He can read most of the material that's given to him and he seems to understand, but if it comes to some sort of assessment where he has to write something down, for example, in science - I asked if he wanted to give me the answers and I would write it down, but he said "No I'll do it myself.". But he only managed to answer two questions out of, say, ten so he really didn't get anywhere. So the next time I actually didn't give him the option, I just said I'd scribe for him and he did very well. It was interesting, he could actually read the questions and he could answer them and I didn't prompt him at all. I just wrote down what he said so it showed that the writing was holding him back.

An illustration of this kind is not consistent, of course, with the idea that success and failure is dependent on some one-dimensional continuum of general ability, and that those who find themselves at the bottom end of that continuum will have a low ceiling on all their achievements. In this case, the pupil had several difficulties (reversing letters, poor spelling, lacking concentration, unsettled, clumsy), but was not without certain strengths. His reading comprehension and ability to answer questions correctly were evident. The teacher appeared to see his cognitive difficulties as a set of discrete dimensions and not as evidence of a lowly position on the global ability continuum.

What is interesting is that many mainstream teachers were ready to recognise that pupils could experience less difficulty, say, in reading than in spelling, but subsequently involved the idea of some overall ability which was seen as determining what they could reasonably be expected to attain. Although learning support staff did not explicitly refer to innate or general ability, many of the strategies they adopted for pupils with difficulties in learning appeared to be fulfilling distinctively different goals from those for the generality of pupils in mainstream classes. This **might** (but not necessarily **would**) suggest an underlying assumption that the cause of the problems lies within the pupils' 'ability levels'.

Any suggestion that the cause of learning difficulties lies within the pupil is in some tension with the view expressed in the HMI report of 1978. That document, and much of the literature of the last decade, has suggested that the school curriculum is the major source of learning difficulties experienced by the pupil. This deliberate shift of focus relating to the source of difficulties has been part of a general movement in educational discourse toward a more positive construction of disadvantaged pupils and has tried to facilitate a more proactive stance within the teaching profession. Our evidence, however, suggests that views of this kind do not necessarily reflect the way the profession, particularly mainstream teachers in secondary schools, thinks about learning difficulties.

Before leaving our discussion of these cognitive difficulties, we should comment on why they were perceived by the teachers as so enduring. There seem to us to have been two factors of importance. First, there was the practical experience of the teachers, particularly mainstream teachers in the primary, which suggested to them that the problems pupils experienced in the early years of primary were either overcome relatively quickly or seemed highly resistant to resolution. For those pupils with problems in the latter category, progression through the primary stages and into the secondary was accompanied by an ever widening gap between their accomplishments and those of the generality of the class. For the teachers, the idea that this was all simply a matter of different rates of development became increasingly untenable. By the later stages of the primary school it appeared that strenuous efforts had come to nothing, back-tracking to the point of emergence of the problem was no longer feasible, the gap could not now be closed and the pursuance of identical goals to those of the majority of mainstream pupils was no longer realistic. We are, of course, providing here an exaggerated, but not uncommon, perception.

The second factor is related to the first in that it addresses the possibility of achieving the same curriculum goals for all pupils, including those with learning difficulties. This aim has to be set alongside those of minimising the sense of failure for any given pupil and avoiding segregation of the lowest achieving pupils from the rest of their class. Concurrent achievement of these three aims is clearly very difficult if not impossible. To take a simple example, one might wish to remedy pupils' reading difficulties through intensive practice, but taking action to achieve that would probably preclude them from following the mainstream curriculum for at least some period of time. As we discuss in Chapter 4, primary staff sometimes extracted pupils from mainstream classes to help with their difficulties, despite believing that they would be discouraged officially from doing so. The alternative usually was to try to meet the needs of these pupils within the mainstream classroom by adopting strategies which lessened the impact of the pupils' difficulties on their work; this was generally done by providing attainable goals which were more limited than those for the rest of the class.

This clearly raises fundamental questions about the nature of learning difficulties and of integration which we will return to in Chapter 4. Meanwhile, we will turn from the cognitive to other kinds of difficulties.

Enduring Behavioural, Social or Emotional Difficulties

Primary and secondary staff identified a wide range of difficulties of this kind. Although we have grouped these together, teachers were clear about the distinctions between them. Four main areas of difficulties emerged:

- unacceptable behaviour - identified by primary and secondary mainstream staff and headteachers
- lack of confidence or shyness - identified by secondary mainstream staff guidance staff and headteachers
- lack of motivation - identified by secondary mainstream staff and headteachers
- social relationships eg relating to peers - identified by primary and secondary headteachers and secondary guidance staff

Teachers saw these difficulties as being frequently interrelated with cognitive difficulties. For example, difficulties in reading would often be associated with a lack of self-confidence and shyness. The following extract from an interview with a secondary learning support teacher illustrates how one pupil's social and emotional difficulties were seen as interacting with cognitive difficulties.

> She has been very, very sheltered at home to the extent that the women in the family tend to do everything for the family - the men and the children have everything done for them, to the extent that this girl has never learned any independence, to the extent that she's now almost 15 years old and can't go shopping on her own, because she can't handle money properly. She's never had to do it and she's now built up such a resistance to the thought of it that she won't even do it. Obviously associated with that, she has difficulties in basic numeracy and literacy, although a lot of it with this particular girl is to do with self image and motivation. She's one of those unfortunate girls who could do better, but has decided that she always fails at things - the way to get round things is that if you don't attempt them you can't fail them. The main things that she finds extremely difficult are science and maths. Her numeracy is extremely poor - she can do simple computational things of addition and subtraction. Multiplication and

> division can only be done using calculators. Her knowledge and understanding of what she's doing - it's hard to assess how much of it is lack of understanding or lack of knowledge or just lack of motivation and there are difficulties with reading - that's probably at about primary six level.

The interplay between the pupils' cognitive difficulties and social and emotional difficulties made it difficult for staff to decide how to meet their needs most effectively. However, the general strategies, which we discuss in Chapter 4, were often seen by staff as addressing cognitive and social or emotional difficulties simultaneously.

We suggested earlier that some of the behavioural, social or emotional difficulties were viewed as short term. For example, it was often thought that class teachers could address behavioural difficulties, particularly in the lower stages of primary school, by encompassing goals for these within other goals for the class. However, as the pupil continued to demonstrate such difficulties throughout the school, staff became less optimistic that they could be resolved as they often became concomitant with enduring cognitive difficulties.

In one of the primary case study schools, special provision was made to meet the needs of pupils with enduring behavioural difficulties and we discuss this in Chapter 4. Here we consider the kinds of behavioural difficulties the staff in the school encountered. Staff estimated that approximately 13 or 14 pupils in the school fell into this category and recognised that although such difficulties might be accompanied by cognitive learning difficulties, it did not always necessarily follow. The headteacher commented:

> I had always believed that learning difficulties and behavioural difficulties went hand in hand, but it's not the case. Our experience has shown that a child can operate satisfactorily at an academic level but can still be playing up and breaking things.

These pupils generally displayed disruptive or violent behaviour, either in the classroom or in the playground. As well as damaging equipment some of the pupils had assaulted their peers and most had been excluded from school on at least one occasion. One such pupil was described by a teacher:

> He's a particularly enigmatic child in that when you meet him he seems like a nice wee boy, but he can't sustain that niceness. I'm being rather unscientific but I think there's a streak of badness in the boy that he just can't control. The class teacher has made mistakes in her level of expectations, but has now found a level where she can maintain some sort of level of educational progress for him. Last year he required virtually one to one support, simply because he could not be contained.

Unusually, this pupil had a Record of Needs opened for him. This appeared to have been of assistance in obtaining resources for the school in the form of staffing and was thought by school staff to have created the impetus for establishing the behavioural support unit.

Staff in the school did not think that it was likely that the behavioural difficulties of certain pupils would ever be resolved. In this sense, strategies for meeting the needs of pupils with enduring behavioural difficulties were similar to those for pupils with enduring cognitive difficulties. They were designed to alleviate the difficulty or circumvent it, rather than remedy it. The teachers indicated that if the behavioural support unit, which we discuss in chapter 4, was not available for these pupils, they would almost certainly be excluded from school permanently and placed outwith the Region, away from their families. The aim of the behavioural support unit, therefore, was to help mainstream staff to maintain the pupils' behaviour at an acceptable level with extra help if the pupils went beyond this.

We have discussed pupils whose difficulties are resolved and those who are regarded as having difficulties of an enduring nature. There is a third group of pupils, however, whose difficulties are viewed as pronounced, specific or complex and such that they require a Record of Needs. There is no clear distinction between this group and those with enduring difficulties whom we have already discussed. Indeed staff told us about pupils whom they felt should have been recorded, but had not been. We shall discuss briefly the pupils for whom Records of Needs were opened.

Recorded Pupils

The purpose of the Record of Needs was to provide information about the nature of pupils' difficulties, rather than to specify how the needs should be met and this proved to be a source of concern to school staff. Record of Needs were accompanied by a considerable amount of information, obtained through a multidisciplinary assessment of the child. However, both primary and secondary staff said that the information provided in the Record of Needs itself was fairly general, and was of limited value to them in trying to meet a pupil's needs. For example, it was often stated that the pupil would benefit from a modified curriculum. The Record did not specify, however, in what ways the curriculum had to be modified for the pupil, nor did it indicate the kinds of teaching approaches or specialised materials to be provided. Furthermore, it appeared that staff in schools had not been given guidance on how to operationalise the Record of Needs, translating the statement of the child's needs into actual classroom practice. We suspect that this is a staff development need which could be addressed by bringing together the complementary skills of the educational psychologists and school staff. This might be one way of addressing the mismatch of expectations of the two groups, which we discuss in Chapter 6.

As we pointed out in Chapter 1, the main significance of a Record of Need was often perceived by staff to be the resources which might come to the school as a consequence, in the form of additional learning support staff, auxiliary staff or equipment such as a phonic ear or a concept keyboard. The Record of Needs was compiled as a consequence of a multidisciplinary assessment of the child and was subject to continuing review, which was undertaken on an annual basis in the Region in which we conducted our research. Additionally, a Future Needs Assessment was carried out to plan the final two years of the pupil's formal education and secondary school staff found a Record of Needs particularly helpful in this respect. It would be mistaken, however, to view Recorded pupils as a homogeneous group. Some pupils had a physical impairment such as a hearing or visual impairment or a physical handicap. These pupils were usually considered to be capable of achieving the same range of goals which teachers had for the generality of pupils. They were expected, for example, to be able to cope with work in mainstream classrooms (with specialist help or equipment) and to be successful in a range of public examinations.

Other recorded pupils experienced cognitive difficulties to varying degrees which were referred to by staff in the Region as severe, moderate or profound learning difficulties. These pupils often lacked fundamental literacy and numeracy skills and basic life skills such as telling the time or handling money. Sometimes pupils experiencing these kinds of difficulties would also have a physical impairment. The recorded pupils with cognitive difficulties were often not expected to be able to cope with the general curriculum, or achieve great success in public examinations.

Learning Difficulties and Expectations of What Pupils Can Achieve

We began this chapter by suggesting that teachers identified three broad categories of pupils with learning difficulties:

- Pupils with difficulties which were viewed as capable of being resolved
- Pupils whose difficulties were fundamental and enduring
- Pupils whose difficulties were fundamental and enduring and who had a Record of Needs

It is interesting to compare this data with our earlier research on classroom processes and on the professional craft knowledge of teachers. In general, our earlier research findings suggested that teachers think about classroom goals primarily in terms of maintaining some state of activity which they see as normal and desirable and conducive to pupils' learning. In setting goals and the standards they expect pupils to achieve, however, they referred to a number of conditions which impinged on their teaching. The most important of these was the teacher's knowledge about the pupils in the class. So, for example, the goals and standards in mathematics for a sixth year studies class would not be the same as those for a group of Christmas leavers. Teachers also had goals for individual pupils, that they should, for example, answer a question, produce a piece of writing, or understand a concept. The setting of goals for specific pupils was influenced by knowledge of that pupil's characteristics. Teachers perceived some of these characteristics as relating to behaviour or performance 'on the day' and required a reactive stance from them. Other characteristics were seen as enduring, such as their abilities, motivations, aptitudes and attitudes and so they could plan in advance to take account of them.

It seems to us that many of the pupils experiencing short term difficulties could be seen as having provoked a reactive stance from teachers. A child or a class had difficulty, for example, with the idea of 'a century' in history and the teacher reacted by drawing immediately on a repertoire of knowledge and actions to explain 'a century' more effectively. Alternatively, a child or a class fails to master a stage of a mathematical operation and so the teacher backtracks to the stage where the difficulty is thought to have arisen and provides extra examples on the blackboard. This contrasted with pupils who had long term difficulties where distinctive goals were set for them based on knowledge or belief of what was normal for pupils with their characteristics to achieve. Indeed, it may be that effective goals concerned with confidence building or enjoyment, for example, were seen as more salient for these pupils than cognitive goals. As we indicated earlier, this raised questions about how accurate teachers were in matching goals to the pupils in their class. This applies to the goals set for all pupils not just pupils with learning difficulties.

Summary

The teachers interviewed suggested that in their experience pupils with learning difficulties tended to fall into three main categories: pupils with short term difficulties, either cognitive or behavioural, social or emotional, which were seen as capable of being resolved; non recorded pupils with enduring cognitive or behavioural social or emotional difficulties and recorded pupils with physical or cognitive difficulties. Staff, particularly those in the primary school, were highly optimistic that many of the difficulties experienced by pupils, even those of an apparently fundamental nature, such as reading, could be resolved. However, as the pupils progressed through primary school and entered secondary school, the optimism for some pupils diminished. Staff began to take the view that at this stage, to backtrack to the point where the difficulty had arisen and to attempt a remedy was unrealistic and that fundamental difficulties of this kind could not be addressed within the mainstream classroom. Teachers' perceptions of these difficulties influenced the kinds of goals they set for their pupils. Those with enduring difficulties were set less demanding goals than the generality of pupils in the class. In addition the strategies used by secondary staff were aimed at lessening the impact of the fundamental difficulties and enabling the pupils to experience success.

In the report of HM Inspectors of Schools (1978) and much of the literature of the last decade, the curriculum was identified as a major cause of learning difficulties and some convincing illustrations of this have been provided. Since then, learning support teachers have been encouraged to look for deficits in the curriculum rather than in the pupil and to persuade their mainstream colleagues to do the same. Clearly the staff interviewed in this study were seeking ways to improve the curriculum, in order that many learning difficulties could be avoided, and they acknowledged where they thought they had failed to do so. However, in order to achieve this goal it is necessary to know what difficulties pupils experience. In order to differentiate, that is to match tasks to the level of the pupil, one has to find a way of determining what the pupils can and cannot do and the reasons for this. As we shall see in Chapter 3, even when learning support staff attempted systematically to pursue a curriculum-based approach they had first to identify the particular kinds of problems the pupils were experiencing before they could recommend a course of action. At a general level, particularly among staff who do not see themselves as specialists in learning difficulties, there does seem to have been some confusion about the emphasis on the curriculum as opposed to the child. We suspect that a lack of shared understanding may have led to some rejection of recent ideas on provision for learning difficulties among those who interpreted the move away from an emphasis on the child to concern about the curriculum as an assertion that 'children do not have difficulties, difficulties reside only in curricula'.

In Chapter 3, we consider how schools tried to identify pupils with learning difficulties.

3

IDENTIFYING PUPILS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Staff used a variety of procedures to enable them to identify the kinds of difficulties which were being experienced and by whom. In the primary school there was a tendency for staff to try to discover the **nature of the difficulties** and to look for the underlying causes of these. As the pupils reached the transition phase from primary to secondary, the kinds of procedures adopted by secondary school staff tended to be oriented towards identifying a **population of pupils with enduring difficulties,** who would require continuing support. We begin with the identification procedures adopted in the primary schools.

Identification in the Primary School

Primary school staff tried to identify any learning difficulties which pupils might have as early as possible, in the hope that many of the difficulties could be resolved. At the enrolment stage, the headteachers usually talked to the parents, giving them the chance to indicate any early concerns about their child. Some schools made contact with the local nursery schools, seeking information about any pupils whom they suspected might have difficulties. Staff in one primary school established identification procedures within the nursery school to which it was linked. These were largely informal, consisting of discussions between the primary and nursery staff and the parents.

Once the pupils commenced their primary education, the class teachers were on the alert for any difficulties which might be apparent and normally communicated this information to the learning support teachers. A number of primary teachers suggested that traditionally learning support staff (at the time known as remedial specialists) would not have any involvement with infant departments. This possibly reflected a view held by mainstream staff, particularly in the lower stages, that pupil development takes place at different rates. Hence, there might have been little concern, at this stage, that a child was reading poorly. This view has changed, however, with the majority of staff citing the importance of 'catching them early'.

A screening programme of all P2 pupils throughout the Region was used to assess their general abilities in the fundamental areas, such as in numeracy, but we did not have the opportunity to analyse the test. From our interviews with the primary teachers, the screening did not appear to have a diagnostic function and was, therefore, of limited value to them. One school combined this with a screening programme of their own, carried out at the P1 and P4 stages. The first of these involved a general discussion of each pupil between the P1 class teacher and the learning support teacher. Both saw this as a highly effective process, as it enabled the class teacher to indicate any difficulties a child might be experiencing, based on her day-to-day contact with the pupils. If any more detailed information was required about a particular pupil, the learning support teacher carried out a diagnostic test, or observed the pupil in class. The screening which was carried out in P4 covered the fundamental areas and pupils with enduring difficulties were excluded from this. This was because the staff thought it would prove to be too difficult for them. They also said that the purpose of the P4 screening was to identify aspects of the curriculum which the pupils had not appeared to have covered. It was revealed, for example, that few of the pupils had mastered complementary addition. On looking back through the SPMG course, staff found it to be deficient in this area and so were able to provide alternative materials. The exclusion of some pupils from the test suggested either that they were, by this time, following a **special** rather than a **mainstream curriculum** or that the test itself could not cope with the pupils' range of abilities.

In one of the primary case study schools, special provision was made for pupils with behavioural difficulties. Staff, therefore, had to be able to discriminate between these kinds of difficulties and learning difficulties and there were procedures for doing so. Any mainstream teacher who was concerned about any child in the class, regardless of the kind of difficulty, would, in the first instance, discuss this with either the assistant headteacher or the headteacher. Through this they would try to determine whether the child's difficulty related to learning or behaviour and whether the mainstream teacher could resolve it by making adaptations to classroom practice. If it was suspected that a child had a learning difficulty which required further investigation the learning support teacher was consulted. A learning difficulty then might be diagnosed (or not) by the learning support teacher or found to be concomitant with a behavioural difficulty, enabling the appropriate support to be provided.

Transition from Primary to Secondary

Staff in the secondary schools recognised the enormous efforts made in the primary school to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and tried to build on this by obtaining as much information about the pupils as possible before they began secondary school. The secondary learning support teachers visited the primary schools within the catchment area, at least once, but often more frequently during the year prior to transfer. They usually met the P7 classroom teachers, the learning support teachers and the headteachers. It could be a gargantuan task to visit all of the associated primary schools and particularly to plan these visits around the arrangements of the peripatetic learning support staff. Furthermore, the opportunities for parents to make their own choice of school, under the terms of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1981, made it impossible for staff to visit all primary schools from which pupils might come. Secondary learning support staff found that the extent of the detail offered about the nature of the pupils' learning difficulties varied from school to school. In some cases they might simply be informed that certain pupils had a history of learning difficulties. Other schools provided a pen portrait of the kinds of difficulties which the pupils experienced or other information, such as the reading age of pupils. In general, however, it was more likely that the two sectors liaised with a view to identifying a **population** of pupils with enduring learning difficulties. This enabled them to plan ahead for the kind of support which might be needed. Some secondary learning support staff spent time in the primary classrooms, generally looking at the pupils' work and chatting informally to them. The visits were in some cases made in conjunction with the guidance staff who, in compiling the pupil transfer form (TR9), would also ascertain which pupils had learning difficulties.

Secondary learning support teachers generally regarded the information about the nature of the pupils' difficulties which they obtained from the primary schools as valid. However, they saw it as having some limitations which could result in the impression that perceptions from staff in primary school of a pupil's ability often did not match up with those of staff in the secondary school. For example, the secondary school presented the pupils with new educational experiences which might give rise to previously unidentified learning difficulties. Some learning support staff also suggested that headteachers of primary schools might underestimate the prevalence of learning difficulties in their school to avoid unfavourable comparisons with other schools. Information from the primary schools, however, was just one of a number of sources available to the secondary learning support staff.

The induction period for the new first year secondary school cohort, which usually took place over five days in June, provided learning support staff with further opportunities to identify pupils with learning difficulties. In some schools the learning support staff observed the pupils in a number of classes during this period and they stressed the importance of building a good relationship with pupils already identified as having learning difficulties at this stage; the induction period gave them a chance to do this very early on in the child's secondary career.

The learning support staff compiled a list of first year pupils with learning difficulties (both recorded and non recorded) and circulated it to mainstream staff. The process was viewed by mainstream staff as both accurate and effective and served to enhance the status of learning support teachers as specialists in the identification of learning difficulties. They pointed out, however, that pupils with learning difficulties might achieve more in particular classes because of the nature of the subject. Subject specialist teachers regarded their own observation of the pupils as an important, alternative source of evidence of pupils with learning difficulties. At some point in the first year, mainstream staff were asked if there were any pupils in their class whom they thought should be added to the list. Interestingly, they did not appear to be invited to remove pupils from the list. Throughout the Region, there were varying degrees of formality in the liaison procedures between mainstream and learning support staff to obtain information about pupils with learning difficulties. In some of the larger schools considerable documentation was involved; in other schools information was passed on by word of mouth. Learning support staff were confident that any pupil with learning difficulties who had not been identified before reaching secondary school would be picked up shortly after entry. As far as pupils with enduring difficulties were concerned this would appear to be the case. We found, however, that the secondary learning support staff often were not made aware of pupils with short term difficulties, which were identified and resolved by mainstream staff or guidance staff.

Observation

Learning support teachers in both the primary and secondary schools placed considerable emphasis on direct observation of pupils in the classroom as a means of ascertaining the nature of their learning difficulties. As a matter of course, learning support teachers monitored pupils, noting progress or lack of it through subject work. In one of the secondary case study schools, however, a more formalised process of observation had been adopted. First year pupils were observed in each lesson on their timetable for one week and learning support staff completed an observation schedule for each child who had been identified as having learning difficulties. They documented the difficulties the pupils appeared to be having in each class, their responses to the teachers and their peers, the strengths they demonstrated and the action considered appropriate to try to meet their needs. The learning support staff recognised that much of the time they were concentrating on the deficits of the pupils, rather than of the curriculum. They reasoned that it was only by doing this across each of the subjects that they could then identify where the curriculum was a contributory factor to learning difficulties. This suggests that difficulties were seen as arising both from the curriculum on offer and from deficiencies in the pupils. Learning support staff also held general discussions with the pupils and then fed their conclusions to mainstream teachers. Mainstream staff said that they welcomed this information, particularly as it had been generated from a 'critical friend' within the school. The process, they said, had made them more conscious of their classroom practice, although they would have welcomed feedback on the appropriateness of the curriculum for all pupils, not only for those with learning difficulties. As we shall see in Chapter 4, however, learning support staff did not always find it easy to fulfil this kind of **educative** role in the school. It is worth noting here that observation which concentrates on those already identified as having difficulty could be interpreted as fostering a **special curriculum** within the mainstream classroom. It is less consistent with a strategy which looks for individual differences and difficulties among all pupils within a mainstream curriculum for everyone. This latter concept would be better served by feedback on the appropriateness of the curriculum for **all** pupils.

Standardised Tests

Learning support staff in both the primary and secondary schools treated standardised tests with a great deal of caution and always in conjunction with their own observation of the pupils in the classroom. Primary learning support staff found them useful in determining more accurately the nature of the learning difficulty. It enabled them, for example, to distinguish between a specific difficulty in visual memory and phonics, both problems associated with reading. However, they thought that the class teacher's day-to-day contact with the pupils made his or her knowledge just as, if not more, valid. Secondary school staff saw the tests as having limited value in providing information about the pupils' difficulties and how to meet their learning needs. By this stage, they suggested, there was little that could be done in response to test results which, for example, showed a pupil to have a reading age of nine. As we suggested in Chapter 2, it was seen as too difficult to backtrack to the point of the learning difficulty and to try to remedy it. However, some value was placed by secondary school staff on the usefulness of tests in providing an approximation of a pupil's cognitive development in, for example, reading and this could help in the selection of appropriate reading material. The Neale analysis and the Macmillan test are tests of reading which were used by a few secondary learning support staff, who took the view that pupils' difficulties in reading could still be addressed in a general way. Both focus on oral reading and helped staff to pinpoint particular errors, such as the mispronunciation and omission of words or parts of words. As well as providing a reading age for the child, the errors could be categorised, for example, according to whether the error represents a suitable phonic alternative, that is whether the sound is recognisable within the language structure. This was seen by some staff as useful in developing specific strategies to help the pupil. For example, one learning support teacher identified a common type of error as occurring where the pupil focuses on the first part of the word and guesses the rest. After recognising this through the test, the teacher was able to encourage the pupil to look at the whole word and to encourage mainstream staff to do the same in any classroom reading task. Two other tests were used by some staff: the Gap Test provided a comprehension age for the pupil and the Vernon Test helped to pinpoint spelling errors. In general, however, learning support staff did not find them particularly useful in helping them to meet the pupils' needs more effectively.

In one of the secondary case study schools, standardised tests had been used extensively by the learning support teacher on first joining the school. This had, it was said, enabled the staff member to understand the learning difficulties experienced by the pupils within a short space of time. It was also suggested that by ascertaining, through various tests, that a pupil's scores were lower in one cognitive area than in another, support in mainstream classes could be more appropriately targeted. After some time, the learning support teacher came to rely less on the standardised tests and more on the observation of pupils in the classroom. This was put down to the teacher's increasing confidence in the accuracy of her own observation and general knowledge of the pupils.

Teachers in the mathematics departments in all of the Region's secondary schools administered a Kent entry test to all pupils at the primary stage to ascertain the appropriate level on which to commence the Kent Mathematics Programme. The test covered whole numbers, vulgar fractions, decimals and problems involving written operations and mainstream and

43

learning support staff found it an accurate indicator of the pupils' abilities in these areas. Tests of this kind, where the whole group is assessed are, of course, much more in the spirit of an approach which looks for a **mainstream curriculum for all** with account being taken of individual differences among pupils.

In one secondary school a test was administered to the entire S1 cohort, in an attempt to identify the more able pupils as well as those with learning difficulties. The test covered general reasoning ability as well as verbal and numerical skills. It was seen as limited, however, in that it could not identify pupils with giftedness in areas such as creative or innovative thinking, giftedness in the visual or performing arts or psychomotor ability. We discuss the provision for the more able in Chapter 7.

Educational Psychologists

The educational psychologists played a key role in the identification of the pupils with recorded difficulties at the primary school stage. They subsequently monitored how the needs of recorded pupils were met, through the review meetings which were held annually. They were also involved in advising on pupils with social and emotional difficulties, often meeting with primary and secondary headteachers or guidance staff on a weekly basis to discuss these pupils. Learning support staff in the primary and secondary schools indicated that they rarely asked the educational psychologists to help identify pupils with cognitive learning difficulties, either short term or enduring, if these were unlikely to warrant opening a Record of Needs.

Summary

Staff in the primary schools tried to identify pupils with learning difficulties as early on as possible, in the hope that many of these could be resolved. As well as the class teachers' observation and the regional screening programme, administered to all P2 pupils, learning support staff sometimes used standardised tests to detail more precisely the nature of pupils' difficulties. The diagnostic capabilities of the tests were, however, fairly limited. Secondary learning support staff also had a variety of sources from which they could identify pupils with enduring learning difficulties. These differed from the approaches used in the primary schools in that they were oriented to identifying a population of pupils with enduring learning difficulties, rather than helping them to understand the nature of the difficulties. Information from the primary schools, mainstream staff, the learning support teachers' own observation, standardised tests and the educational psychologists were each regarded as having strengths and weaknesses. By drawing on each of them to varying degrees, however, secondary staff could build what they saw as a fairly valid picture of the pupils' difficulties and decide how best to meet their needs.

There were conflicting signals, however, about how the teachers viewed the relationships among the child, the curriculum and the learning difficulties. On the one hand, there was evidence of a thrust towards making best use of specialists (learning support teachers and, to a lesser extent, educational psychologists) to identify those children with learning difficulties and to refine the information about the nature of their difficulties. Once these difficulties had been detailed, the learning support and mainstream teachers would be better placed to provide a curriculum tailored to those pupils with enduring difficulties. This curriculum was essentially different from that for the generality of pupils. On the other hand, approaches which used tests for, or observation of, all pupils and interpreted the findings to decide what level of the curriculum, kinds of tasks or aspects of support should be offered to each member of the class, were consistent with a view that there was one mainstream curriculum for all with provision for individual differences within the class.

In Chapters 4 and 5 we consider how teachers tried to meet the needs of the pupils whom they identified as having learning difficulties.

4

MEETING THE NEEDS OF PUPILS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Introduction

As we pointed out in Chapter 2, teachers saw pupils with learning difficulties as falling into three main groups:

- Pupils with difficulties which were viewed as capable of being resolved
- Pupils whose difficulties were fundamental and enduring
- Pupils whose difficulties were fundamental and enduring and who had a Record of Needs

In this chapter we will consider the strategies which staff adopted to meet the needs of these different groups of children. We will also discuss the aims these were intended to fulfil and their effectiveness in the opinion of the teachers. We begin with how staff tried to resolve the short term difficulties which pupils experienced.

Short Term Difficulties

In Chapter 2 we highlighted some differences in how primary and secondary school staff talked about short term difficulties. In general, however, short term difficulties tended to be categorised as either cognitive or as social, behavioural and emotional. Cognitive difficulties might arise as a consequence of the intrinsic difficulty of the subject, inadequate materials or the teaching approaches used. They might, on the other hand, have been caused by the pupil's absence from school or from personal circumstances such as bereavement or divorce. Some of the social, behavioural and emotional difficulties were viewed as short term, particularly those identified by primary school staff and secondary guidance staff. We consider first the attempts by secondary school staff to resolve short term cognitive difficulties.

Short Term Cognitive Difficulties in the Secondary School

Secondary school staff told us about a number of pupils who had experienced difficulties with a particular concept or operation, for example, division in mathematics. Difficulties such as these were commonly experienced by pupils of all abilities and were part of the everyday classroom experiences. They were most commonly identified and resolved by the class teacher, without the help of the learning support teacher. Staff had some difficulty, however, in pinpointing what they had done to enable pupils eventually to grasp the concept. Such difficulty is unsurprising as this process is an integral part of the teacher's routine classroom actions and the things one does habitually and more or less automatically are always the hardest to articulate. However, it is clearly an aspect which we can hope to illuminate in future work.

At a general level, our data suggests that mainstream staff often tried to approach the concept another way or to provide extra examples to give the child further practice. Sometimes the use of supplementary material such as a television programme or other visual aid was found useful. For example, the difficulty in comprehending geographical contours was, it was claimed, overcome by providing a visual model.

The effects of absence were generally tackled by the guidance staff in a bid to prevent longer term difficulties from ensuing. They did this either during the absence, by collecting work from the mainstream staff to send home or by ensuring that the pupil caught up on return to school. Some mainstream staff said that if a child had fallen behind as a consequence of having been absent they gave them extra work to enable them to catch up or they used an interval or lunch break to take the child through what they had missed.

The lack of any involvement of secondary learning support staff in resolving short term cognitive difficulties is perhaps not surprising. Mainstream teachers, it could be argued, are better placed to identify the source of a difficulty arising, for example, through insufficient opportunities to practice a cognitive operation and to provide the appropriate means to remedy it. Nevertheless, as Simpson (1988) points out:

> If we know something well, we infer information which is missing, overlook contradictions and reject distractions without being aware of doing it. It is indeed the very knowledgeability of specialist teachers which makes it difficult for them to recognise the ambiguities and sources of confusion in what they teach.

Learning support teachers from the secondary schools argued that they were in a unique position to enable them to identify sources of short term difficulties, both proactively and reactively. They were frustrated, however, by the limited opportunities available to them to do so and in Chapter 5, we examine how this reflected differing notions of the kinds of professional expertise required to meet different needs. Here we consider how primary school staff tried to resolve short term cognitive difficulties.

Short Term Cognitive Difficulties in the Primary School

As we suggested in Chapter 2, staff in the primary school were optimistic that many of the pupils who had been identified as experiencing cognitive difficulties could be helped to overcome them. This applied not only to difficulties with a particular cognitive operation or concept, but also to more fundamental difficulties, such as reading or numeracy.

Short term cognitive difficulties in the primary schools were most commonly resolved by the class teachers by backtracking to the point where the difficulty had arisen. They found this relatively easy to do, particularly in the lower parts of the primary school, but said that it became increasingly more difficult as the pupil became more distanced from the point where understanding had broken down. Teachers were able to establish the stage of the conceptual operation at which the pupils had become 'stuck' by listening to their account of what they were attempting to do. Sometimes the pupils had misunderstood, miscalculated or had been misinformed and this simply required correction. In other instances, the teacher diagnosed that previous stages of the operation had not been sufficiently well established, so the pupil was given further practice, with perhaps a recapitulation or further explication of the process by the teacher before moving on. A common difficulty for teachers in providing this kind of remediation was that the pupils often appeared dissatisfied at being asked to go back a stage. Staff tried to overcome this by providing exercises on the blackboard, rather than going to a previous stage of the materials, which pupils had already covered. They also often included the whole class in these exercises, giving pupils the impression that they would all benefit from extra practice.

There were some pupils whom class teachers felt would require extra support in order to resolve their difficulties. These pupils usually had more fundamental difficulties, such as in reading or numeracy and were given extra assistance in these areas by learning support staff. The most common kinds of help provided by learning support teachers were listening to pupils read, providing intensive work with phonics or helping with numeracy. They did this either within the classroom or by extracting the pupils. In Chapter 5, we discuss the role of the learning support staff within the classroom, but here we consider how extraction was used by primary staff to meet the needs of pupils with short term cognitive difficulties.

Extraction in the Primary School

Nine of the ten primary learning support staff interviewed said that they extracted some children from time to time. They believed that this was contrary to regional and national guidelines, although this did not appear to be stated explicitly anywhere. The one teacher who did not extract said it was only a lack of space which prevented her from doing so. Several learning support teachers suggested that much of the help they provided within the classroom (when, for instance, they came in to help individual pupils with reading or number work) would be more appropriately termed extraction. Learning support staff argued that extraction was an important strategy, particularly in the early stages of primary school, as it enabled them to try to resolve pupils' particular difficulties and place them in a position to achieve the same curriculum goals as their peers. One learning support teacher identified the dilemma they faced:

> I know that the policy suggests that as much as possible should be done in the classroom. I believe in it as long as it's effective. I don't believe in doing it as a matter of course. With language difficulties, it's not just a case of modifying the curriculum. The difficulties themselves have to be tackled.

Another learning support teacher commented:

> Extraction is sometimes appropriate when you want to work on something specific. Reading, which I help children with, doesn't fit in with the

> curriculum so to do it in the classroom is an artificial situation and it's integration just for the sake of it.

Staff found it especially useful to extract a pupil if their difficulties were associated with concentration and where either they or the other pupils in the class might be easily distracted.

In some cases the learning support teachers felt pressured by mainstream staff to extract pupils. As this learning support teacher commented:

> There were so many children with difficulties - behavioural difficulties too and they wanted me to take them out. They couldn't cope or these children were getting them down and they wanted me to give them a break. I tried to convince them that I could help them more in the classroom, but they want a physical break. They want to know that the body that roams endlessly around the room is out.

Primary mainstream and learning support staff cited numerous examples of extraction helping pupils to overcome short term difficulties. Nevertheless, they were uneasy about a practice which they perceived to be contrary to both regional and national guidelines. A number of learning support staff indicated that they had been criticised, particularly from outwith school, for extracting pupils.

Of the twenty nine secondary learning support teachers interviewed, sixteen said that they extracted certain pupils. This was usually done to provide general support to pupils with long term difficulties across a number of subject areas or to teach the child particular skills such as wordprocessing. Secondary staff also acknowledged some pressure, largely from outside school, to avoid extraction and to concentrate their efforts in the mainstream classroom. However, these pressures and the disadvantages of labelling were seen as outweighed by the benefits to the pupil of this kind of help. Many learning support staff emphasised the security engendered in the child through the knowledge that there was a figure in the school with whom they could identify and obtain help on any aspect of the curriculum.

At one level, it is clear that removing pupils from the classroom could lead to stigmatisation of those with learning difficulties. It is also possible to empathise with the concerns expressed in the HMI report (1978) that extraction could put the pupil at a disadvantage and apart from his or her peers if goals are established which differ from those for the generality of the class. Our evidence from teachers, however, particularly in the primary schools, suggested that extraction helped them to maintain the general class goals for the pupils with difficulties. This would not have been possible, had the pupils remained entirely in the classroom, falling progressively further behind. Taking reading as an example, the pupil might be extracted for extra help either for reading itself or for work with phonics. While the two kinds of **processes** might differ, they would be aimed at fulfilling the **same goals**, enabling the child to attain a reading age appropriate for his or her age. As we shall see in our discussion of enduring difficulties, different processes can be aimed at fulfilling quite distinctive goals for pupils with learning difficulties, but this did not seem to be the intention behind extraction for those seen as having short term problems. Before discussing the enduring difficulties, however, we consider how staff resolved those behavioural, social and emotional difficulties which were viewed as short term.

Pupils with Short Term Social, Behavioural and Emotional Difficulties

Most teachers in the primary schools thought that behavioural and social difficulties could often be resolved by the class teacher. The improvement of behaviour or, more generally, social training was often encompassed within the teacher's goals for the class, particularly in the early stages of the primary school. Such difficulties were typically seen as enduring when displayed by older primary pupils and were often associated with cognitive difficulties.

In one of the primary case study schools, special provision was made for pupils with behavioural difficulties, in the hope that many of these might be resolved. Some of the pupils in this school had more enduring difficulties of this kind. Staff thought these could, at best, be kept under control and we discuss their longer term strategies later in this chapter. As far as short term behavioural difficulties were concerned, the approach within the school was largely proactive. Class teachers were exhorted to adopt a positive approach to managing behaviour within their classroom, with the emphasis on rewarding good behaviour, in the hope of encouraging, rather than punishing bad behaviour. As we mentioned in Chapter 3, teachers could meet with the headteacher or the assistant headteacher if they felt there was a problem within the class. This gave them opportunity to try to distinguish between behavioural difficulties and learning difficulties, by discussing the various kinds of evidence. If the former was apparent, the teachers planned ways of modifying teaching strategies to try to address them. If behavioural difficulties were discounted, the help of the learning support teacher was sought. Where a class teacher felt that the behaviour of any child was outwith his or her control, help was at hand in the form of an extra teacher from the school's behavioural support unit. This teacher could either come into the classroom and provide extra support or extract an individual child. The emphasis, however, was on trying to maintain the pupils within the classroom.

Almost all of the staff in the school had undergone the 'Batpack' staff development programme, provided by the Region's psychological service, which they said had encouraged them greatly in adopting this approach to behavioural difficulties. One class teacher described how valuable she had found it to be:

> We focused on the classroom rules and how negative they can be. It was absolutely true, mine were full of "do nots". So I went over them and it's now, "we always try to be." It really did work because I kept hearing them reminding each other at the beginning of the year and they've stuck to them. It sounds so trivial but it has helped.

In the lessons we observed there was evidence of this approach throughout the school. In the P1 class, for example, pupils were congratulated regularly for good behaviour, and the class teacher obtained their attention by praising those who were 'ready'. As the staff suggested, this is simply effective classroom management, but it is often easy to forget to be positive with a class, particularly where there are behavioural difficulties. This is an interesting point because, although staff had benefited from being reminded in this way, the general view was that there was not a 'body of knowledge' which enabled them to address behavioural difficulties more effectively. Furthermore, the teacher from the support unit was viewed as effective because of her freedom from other commitments to provide help, rather than through any particular skills or knowledge she might possess in relation to behavioural difficulties.

Emotional difficulties were sometimes regarded as short term where they appeared to be caused by some identifiable factor, for example, a bereavement. In the primary schools attempts to help the pupil were made either by the class teacher or the headteacher. In the secondary schools, on the other hand, it was usually the guidance staff who regarded these kinds of difficulties as their responsibility. Both primary and secondary staff usually tried to discuss the difficulties with the pupil, and in some cases the family, as well as encouraging general sensitivity throughout the school. Sometimes it was considered appropriate to involve outside agencies in this context and we discuss these links in Chapter 6.

For many of the pupils, attempts to resolve cognitive or other difficulties were unsuccessful and we infer that they went on to experience these difficulties throughout the rest of their schooling. We devote the remainder of this chapter to meeting the needs of pupils with enduring difficulties in primary and secondary schools.

Meeting the Needs of Pupils with Enduring Difficulties

As we pointed out in Chapter 2, a large proportion of pupils (about 20%) were viewed as having difficulties which were unlikely to be resolved. These pupils did not have needs so pronounced, specific or complex that they had a Record of Needs opened for them. Rather, they were typically regarded as 'slow' or 'less able' although, as we shall see below, some teachers found it difficult to understand why these pupils did not have a Record of Needs. The difficulties tended to be categorised as either cognitive or as behavioural, social and emotional, although they were sometimes thought to be interrelated. The most common kinds of difficulties were cognitive and so we begin by discussing how staff tried to meet the needs of these pupils.

Non Recorded Pupils with Enduring Cognitive Difficulties

Many teachers expressed the view that the cognitive difficulties of a few of these pupils were so pronounced, specific or complex that they felt they should have been recorded. It was generally held that if this had not been done at the primary stage, it was too late. Secondary staff, in particular, expressed much dissatisfaction and frustration at this. A Record of Needs does not guarantee statutory provision, but from the school staff's point of view it appeared to have considerable resource implications and a great deal of 'clout'. It could be particularly important for public examinations and transition to tertiary education. The Scottish Examination Board makes special accommodations for recorded pupils, co-ordinated through the Future Needs Assessment, although it will consider individual cases of pupils who do not have Record of Needs. Further education colleges and various community organisations are also involved through the Future Needs Assessment, with a view to making provision for recorded pupils. Teachers thought that some pupils were 'missing out' on such opportunities by not having a Record of Needs. Nevertheless, they set about trying to meet the needs of **all** the pupils within the school, regardless of whether or not they had a Record of Needs. Teachers tried to meet the needs of non-recorded pupils in two ways: the differentiation of learning materials and co-operative teaching These were intended to fulfil four main and inter-related aims:

- to mitigate the impact of the learning difficulties, cognitive as well as social and emotional on the pupils' general achievement in the classroom in order that they could experience success
- to provide alternative, more limited, but more attainable goals within the mainstream setting
- to give the pupils with learning difficulties confidence
- to ease the burden on the mainstream teacher

In discussing these two broad strategies, teachers revealed clear ideas about the different realms of professional expertise required to deal with pupils with learning difficulties and we discuss these in Chapter 5, in the context of learning support in the classroom. Here we consider the role of differentiated materials in meeting the needs of pupils with enduring cognitive difficulties.

Differentiated Learning Materials

Staff in both the primary and secondary schools placed considerable emphasis on the role of differentiated learning materials in meeting the needs of all pupils with learning difficulties. In the secondary schools these were specifically aimed at limiting the impediment of the fundamental cognitive difficulties, such as in reading and writing, on the pupils' progress by reducing the emphasis on these elements. Many of the materials in the primary schools, on the other hand, gave pupils with enduring difficulties the opportunity to progress at a slower pace. This differed from work produced specifically for Recorded pupils which was intended to provide them with some of the fundamental skills. Some of the differentiated materials were commercially produced while others had been prepared in the school. It was not possible, given the scope of the research, to study these in detail. However, in each of the secondary case study schools we interviewed a teacher from the mathematics department in which commercially produced materials were in use and a teacher from a department using materials produced within the school. In our interviews with primary staff, we asked them about both commercially and school produced materials. We begin with the commercially produced materials.

Commercially Produced Materials

The Kent Mathematics Project, a commercially produced package, was adopted throughout the Region's secondary schools in 1984. Each pupil works at his or her own pace through an individual matrix of tasks at a level of difficulty appropriate to his or her own ability. The pupil checks his or her own answers periodically and, if experiencing difficulty, seeks help through the particular system used in the class. Our evidence on these systems suggested that in some cases this involved a list placed on the teacher's desk onto which the pupils placed their names and they were then called to the desk in turn. In other cases the pupils raised their hands and the teachers came to them. The pupils in the lessons which were observed appeared to be industrious and demonstrated integrity in checking their answers. The 'L' levels of the materials, designed for pupils with learning difficulties, provided simplified tasks involving more steps and requiring less reading, but similar areas of content were covered. Whether they were all expected to learn the same things, however, is open to question. It was generally held by school staff that they could not have produced materials of this quality themselves, given time constraints. The limited number of examples in certain sections was seen as a major weakness in the materials, but staff were able to supplement these using other resources such as textbooks. The retention of one traditional maths lesson per week, it was argued, enabled teachers to consolidate certain concepts which they thought had been inadequately dealt with in the Kent programme. Both mainstream and learning support teachers suggested that because all pupils worked individually, using the same system to seek help, there was little chance of pupils with learning difficulties being stigmatised.

Primary teachers throughout the Region used SPMG materials, supplemented by other commercially produced materials, to teach mathematics. These were regarded favourably by most, particularly for their attractive design and the interest they generated among the pupils. It was suggested that the SPMG course could be followed by most pupils with learning difficulties, albeit at a slower pace than their peers. It was not unusual, for example, for a P5 pupil with difficulties in numeracy to be working at the level intended for P4 pupils. SPMG seemed to differ from the Kent programme in its apparent lack of scope for providing less difficult (or more challenging) tasks **within** a particular level. Whereas two pupils at the same stage of the Kent programme may have differing demands placed on them, determined by their individual matrix, the primary pupils seemed to progress through the same work, but would be at different stages, depending on how quickly they worked. The class teachers sometimes modified this, however, by supplementing work which might place different demands on pupils, for example providing work to consolidate particular skills to some and problem solving activities to others.

School Produced Materials

The way in which secondary school staff developed their own learning materials was to a large extent dictated by how those involved construed the necessary professional expertise. This most commonly combined the ideas of the content which mainstream staff wished to cover with the learning support teacher's

- knowledge of the pupils' learning difficulties
- knowledge of the appropriateness of the content for pupils with learning difficulties
- facility for adapting language and layout

Learning support staff reported frustration when consulted **in retrospect** about learning materials. This often forced them to be critical about mainstream teachers' efforts and involved considerable work for them in rewriting. They felt able to be more constructive when co-operating **from the outset** in the preparation of materials with their mainstream colleagues. One computing teacher explained how a particular unit of work had been prepared with this kind of co-operation.

> What I tended to have was the ideas of what we wanted the kids to be able to do and the tasks leading up to it and then in conjunction with the learning support teacher we had to design it in such a way that it wouldn't be too tough, so that I was giving the computing book and the learning support teacher was giving me almost the pupils' point of view in trying to design it to suit as many pupils as possible. I think that because the learning support teacher had a greater awareness of the levels of difficulty of pupils that she highlighted things that I had expected to be ok.

The learning materials we were told about in the case studies of secondary schools often comprised a core of content at a level which, it was thought, could be tackled by all pupils in the class with extension work for the more able. We were also shown a Modern Studies unit, produced at three levels. At the lowest level pupils were given fairly closed tasks, for example filling in words to complete a paragraph. Pupils on the next level of the same task were given a list of words with which they were to compile a paragraph. Those working at the top level were required to write the paragraph without having been supplied with the words. The provision of the three levels of tasks were intended to address general learning difficulties as well as those specifically related to writing. However, the limitation on the amount of writing required by some of the tasks would clearly restrict pupils' opportunities to express their own ideas. Whilst it may be the case that the tasks differ in their inherent difficulty, they would be better described as distinctively different tasks (different in nature) than thought of as similar tasks at different levels. The staff involved in the preparation of materials said that it was generally their intention that pupils with learning difficulties would 'learn the same content' as the other pupils but would do so at a slower pace and with more direction.

This is an interesting point in two respects. First, there is the question of whether the teachers were referring to **coverage** or **learning** of the 'same content'. Were all pupils, therefore, expected to **achieve** at the same level or just be exposed to the same material in different ways? What was clear was that the three levels of task implied quite different **processes** (insertion of words, construction of paragraphs around words and creative generation of material) and so different kinds of achievement in that sense. Whether achievement in **content** was seen as independent of process it is hard to say. Secondly, there was an explicit distinction drawn between the ways in which the more able and less able learned. The latter are seen as learning at a slower pace (almost by definition) and achieving better when they had more direction.

It would be necessary to undertake an observational study in classrooms with a detailed analysis of differentiated learning materials to ascertain whether indeed the goals were the same for all pupils and the only distinctions were in the **methods** of achieving those goals. If that were the case, it would be an unusual finding. Most examples where claims have been made that different methods can be used with different pupils to achieve the same goals turn out to have addressed different goals for different levels of activity.

Both mainstream and learning support staff in the secondary schools thought that the learning materials produced in school for pupils with learning difficulties were of a high calibre, enabling them to find success within their capabilities. The main problem was that contraints of time restricted opportunities for learning support staff and mainstream staff to work together to produce more of this.

Teachers found various ways of providing differentiated materials to limit the amount of reading required of a pupil. One common method, used in all sixteen secondary schools, was to provide worksheets or whole units of work with small amounts of text, in short simplified sentences. These were widely spaced and extensively illustrated. Commercially abridged novels, such as 'The Runaways' by Victor Canning were commended by most because the language had been simplified and the text reduced but the excitement of the original text had been maintained. This was important because, in seeking to reduce the amount of reading required, staff were concerned not to patronise pupils by giving them reading materials which were simplistic. Tape recordings of novels were favoured by some as a way of removing the obstacle of reading, but it was pointed out that the pupils might not always understand what they heard. Others saw the provision of precis of chapters, to give pupils an outline of the novel, as a useful approach.

As far as primary school pupils with enduring difficulties were concerned, the materials which were developed seemed to be aimed at providing the pupils with opportunities to progress at a level which teachers saw as appropriate for younger pupils. In the same way as pupils with difficulties in numeracy worked on a lower level of the SPMG materials, staff might provide other work which had been prepared with pupils in lower stages of the primary school in mind. Similarly, those with difficulties in reading were given readers intended for younger pupils. Teachers often said this was difficult to do because the pupils resented doing anything which appeared to them to be 'babyish', such as a book text with larger print. Interestingly enough one headteacher had introduced a paired reading scheme with the P3 and P7 classes in the school, principally to fulfil affective goals such as fostering relationships between the two groups. However, while the P3 pupils gained valuable extra reading practice it also, the teacher thought, enabled a P7 pupil with significant reading difficulties to practice reading books brought by the younger pupils pupils with less possibility of stigma.

We have suggested that as the pupils progressed to the upper stages of the primary school, staff came to accept that certain individuals would have cognitive difficulties which would continue into the secondary school. While our evidence suggests that there was very little consultation between the two sectors about the learning materials used, there were remarkable similarities in the work they provided and perhaps the special curriculum they might be sustaining for these pupils. Worksheets or the lowest level of differentiated work developed within primary schools generally involved the pupils in work which was typically highly structured and involved different processes (insertion of words and construction of paragraphs around words) and possibly different levels of achievement.

Learning support staff in the primary schools were often asked by class teachers to provide specific work for pupils with learning difficulties. Unlike their counterparts in the secondary schools, however, there was little evidence that they saw this as enabling them to fulfil an educative role with the mainstream teachers. Learning support staff did not, for example, seek to prepare such work jointly with the class teachers and were more inclined simply to provide such materials on demand.

Other Strategies for Enduring Cognitive Difficulties

So far we have concentrated on differentiated materials as the main ways of meeting the needs of pupils with enduring difficulties. Other approaches were adopted. For example, pupils experiencing difficulties in writing were provided with access to a word processor or a typewriter, enabling them to produce legible drafts of their work. This allowed them to avoid dependence on their own handwriting which could easily lead to failure on the whole task.

Other approaches involved the learning support teacher acting as a scribe for pupils, either in the classwork or in assessments.

Some of the secondary mainstream teachers claimed that the nature of their subject was such that all pupils, including those with learning difficulties, could derive a sense of achievement. One computing teacher argued that the child with difficulties in writing would benefit in his subject from not having to string together long sentences; another said that difficulties with manipulative skills need not be a problem because of the small amount of keyboarding work required; and a music teacher pointed out that because the children were involved in a practical way from the outset, those with difficulties in reading or writing were not disadvantaged and even those with difficulties in manipulative skills could perform half of a musical task (eg a keyboarding task with one hand) with success.

Enduring Behavioural Social and Emotional Difficulties

Staff, particularly those in secondary schools and upper stages of primary schools expressed very little optimism that difficulties of this kind could be resolved, particularly because they were often viewed by this time as concomitant with cognitive difficulties. As one secondary mainstream teacher said:

> Who can blame him for being a behaviour problem, when he's achieving very, very little in the school? It must be so demoralising.

In one of the case study schools, however, staff took the view that even enduring behavioural difficulties could at least be kept under control. We talked earlier about how staff in this school tried to resolve short term behavioural difficulties. They approached more enduring difficulties by seeking to exert some control on a pupil as soon as they sensed any danger signs, and made a variety of support mechanisms available to the class teacher.

The kinds of pupils of concern here were those who were in many cases violent as well as disruptive within the class. Some of these had previously been excluded from school and one pupil, unusually, had been recorded specifically for his behavioural difficulties. The behavioural support unit had been established with the aim of avoiding what seemed to be the inevitable consequences for such pupils. Further exclusion and placement in schools outwith the catchment area and separation from their families would have almost certainly have been the fate of at least a handful of pupils.

Pupils with enduring behavioural difficulties were clearly identified within the school. Both the pupils and their class teachers were in regular contact with the teacher from the behavioural support unit. Some of the pupils, however, spent as little as fifteen minutes at the beginning of each day in the support unit; this was viewed as all that was required to "start the pupil off on the right footing". The emphasis was on integrating the pupils within their own classroom and only increasing the amount of extraction to the support unit when really necessary. The pupils each had a record book in which the class teacher could report on their behaviour and which was monitored by the support unit teacher. As well as the regular contact with the support unit teacher, class teachers could send for help at any time. As one teacher said:

> If I see the danger signs I send for help before anything happens because I found to my cost that if you battle against it yourself and try to stop the bad behaviour things just get worse. My classroom was almost wrecked. If I get the support unit teacher in time, she comes and takes him out. If she's too late, he just won't come.

Staff in the school who had contact with these pupils said that the support unit had been invaluable. The pupils' behaviour had been controlled to such an extent that they were achieving a great deal within the classroom and class teachers were grateful for the kind of support they could call upon.

We have no evidence on the long term outcomes of this approach. It appears to have been effective in the short term in facilitating some learning by disruptive pupils in mainstream classrooms without undue disturbance of the rest of the class. Whether it leads to more conforming behaviour in the future and whether it has other, possibly less desirable, effects on the individual pupil we have no way of knowing. There was one further important strategy for supporting pupils with enduring behavioural difficulties and that was to involve parents. In Chapter 6 we discuss parental support more generally, but here we consider their role in this school in relation to pupils with behavioural difficulties.

Parental Support for Pupils with Behavioural Difficulties

Staff in the school saw little point in trying to address enduring behavioural difficulties if their efforts were not matched at home and so they tried to establish links with the parents of pupils with difficulties of this kind. Weekly meetings with the parents were established by the support unit teacher at a time when the pupil was in the support unit. The general aim of the meetings was to exchange information about the pupil and discuss ideas of how to encourage and reward good behaviour. Parents were asked to provide positive reinforcement to their child if behaviour had been good, without making it a financial burden. The child, for example could be taken to a football match or given the chance to choose the weekend video. The pupils also had a home book, in which the parents were encouraged to record daily how the pupil had spent the previous evening and to provide any information which might enable the staff to anticipate difficult behaviour. The staff had been successful in encouraging almost all of the parents to establish this kind of contact with the school and we interviewed one parent who was involved. He found the weekly meetings very valuable in providing the opportunity to exchange information. He was aware of trying to continue at home the positive approach adopted in the school and saw this as effective. Above all, however, he stressed that the support unit had prevented his child from having been excluded from the school and separated from the family. Concern was expressed, however, by both the parent and school staff that this level of support was not provided in the secondary school within the catchment area and so their heightened expectations would not be sustained.

The extent of parental involvement in this school is interesting because, as we report in Chapter 6, both primary and secondary school staff often found it difficult to establish contact with parents. Staff in the school attributed their success to their efforts in convincing parents that they were capable of exercising as much influence over their child's behaviour as could be accomplished in the school. They had, they thought, 'demystified' the strategies in the parents eyes.

Throughout this chapter we have talked about non-recorded pupils (apart from one individual with behavioural problems) whose difficulties were capable of being resolved and those whose difficulties were seen as more enduring. There was, however, a group of pupils who had a Record of Needs and it is to these we now turn.

Meeting the needs of Recorded Pupils

There were approximately 218 recorded pupils of school age in this particular Region. The needs of these pupils were diverse and included both cognitive and physical difficulties such as disablement or visual or hearing impairment. Since 1983, it had been regional policy to integrate recorded pupils, as far as possible, into mainstream classrooms in their own neighbourhood schools. Provision for the pupils, detailed in the Records of Needs, has commonly included resources, such as specialist auxiliary or learning support staff or equipment. The kinds of help available to many recorded pupils with physical difficulties tended to be directed at alleviating their difficulties so that they can achieve the same range of cognitive goals as the generality of pupils in the school. For example, for one particular recorded child with physical difficulties, the major problem was one of access to some departments in the school. The cost of installing a lift was viewed as prohibitive but an alternative, a 'Stair Mate', was provided by the Region. This enabled the pupil to gain access to all parts of the school. The physical difficulties of this pupil were such that often she could only attend school for part of the day. Adaptations were made, however, to her timetable in order that she could maximise the effectiveness of her time in school.

In eight of the sixteen secondary schools, in which there was a concentration of recorded pupils with cognitive difficulties, learning centres were established. Staff perceived these as a 'middle ground' for the recorded pupils, in which they could learn fundamental skills of literacy and numeracy as well as life skills, such as telling the time and handling money. The possibility that the learning centre could perpetuate the segregation of recorded pupils was acknowledged by most staff. Attempts were made to avoid this by following the regional recommendation to register recorded pupils in a mainstream class and, where possible, by locating the learning centre in a central part of the school. We observed recorded pupils in both learning centres and mainstream classes. In one secondary school a large proportion of recorded pupils were taught certain mainstream subjects, but learning support staff perceived it to be inappropriate to integrate them functionally for these aspects of the curriculum, that is to place them with their mainstream peers. Instead they were taught mainly as two separate classes following courses prepared especially for them. Staff referred to this kind of provision as 'mainstreaming by subject' with pupils from the learning centre as distinct from 'mainstreaming with peers'. As an illustration of how this might look in practice, one pupil spent 13 of a total of 30 periods in the learning centre following a specific leavers programme consisting of maths, English and life skills. He attended TVEI, technical studies, home economics, music, PE, art, science and computing with a quasi-mainstream group of pupils from the learning centre. Social Education was taken with his peer group.

In four of the Region's other secondary schools, a learning support teacher had special responsibility for recorded pupils. We conducted case studies in two of these schools and found that provision for recorded and non-recorded pupils was quite separate. In the other schools in which there were Recorded pupils, although learning support staff had to give priority to their needs, this had to be combined with meeting the needs of other pupils with learning difficulties. Recorded pupils were almost always accompanied in mainstream classrooms either by auxiliary staff or learning support staff. It was often found that the recorded pupils were unable to cope with the mainstream work, even that which had been differentiated to try to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. In these circumstances, the Recorded pupils would engage in work within the classroom which had been prepared especially for them by learning support staff and which was usually intended to provide the pupils with some of the fundamental skills of literacy and numeracy.

Three of the twelve primary schools included in the first round of interviews had learning centres. It appeared that a special curriculum was provided within the learning centre for the pupils who spent relatively short periods of time in mainstream classrooms. Where there were only a few recorded pupils in the school, they were generally taught within the mainstream classroom, with support from either a learning support teacher or a special needs auxiliary. Some of the recorded pupils we were told about had both physical and cognitive difficulties. It seemed that these pupils were following a special curriculum within the mainstream classroom in the sense that they had their own programme of work. Where there was a learning support teacher or an auxiliary in the classroom constantly, they would usually oversee the pupil's work. This was, in some cases, a source of frustration to the class teacher who wanted to take some responsibility for the child's work, particularly where the pupil might benefit from joining in with the rest of the class. For example the class teacher might want to include the recorded pupils in class discussions or exchanges of personal news; the learning support teacher or auxiliary, however, tended to inhibit general participation with the rest of the class. Clearly this is an area which could be resolved through discussion among staff but it does suggest the difficulty in defining the roles of those concerned and some lack of clarity or agreement about the most appropriate goals for the recorded pupils.

Two of the primary schools had hearing units which gave the school 'learning centre status' and made a difference to the schools' staffing allocation. We included one of these schools in our case studies; three pupils in this school with profound hearing impairment were integrated into the mainstream and spent approximately one third of their day in the hearing unit and most of the staff and other pupils in the school had been taught to communicate using sign language. The teachers seemed to have the same goals for the pupils with hearing impairment as those for the generality of the class. We were interested to explore, therefore, whether the teachers in this school had the same aspirations for pupils with **cognitive** difficulties.

The use of sign language and the provision of hearing aids helped to circumvent communication difficulties and, in the lessons which were observed, the pupils with hearing impairment followed exactly the same curriculum as the others in the class. All three pupils were in a composite infants class, accompanied by a teacher of the hearing impaired. However, rather than providing specialist help to the three children, she worked as another class teacher. Both teachers worked with all of the pupils, usually signing as well as talking if introducing a new topic, although the class teacher did not sign if she was talking only to hearing children. The hearing children usually signed and spoke when they were communicating with the teachers or with the hearing impaired children. It was intriguing to see them do this with apparent ease and on several occasions we observed them communicating information which they thought might have been missed by the hearing impaired pupils. The class teacher said that it was fairly demanding to sign throughout lessons, as it was still fairly new to her but one or two of the pupils in the class who were particularly adept at signing often helped her out.

It is interesting to compare the approach to meeting the needs of the hearing impaired pupils with that for the two recorded pupils with cognitive difficulties in the same school. They were also in a mainstream classroom, but it seemed that they were following the kind of special curriculum we have already described. The needs of non-recorded pupils appeared to be met in much the same way as in other schools, through extraction, support in the classroom and differentiated materials. It seems, then, that the school's distinctive approach to meeting the needs of the pupils with hearing impairment did not influence significantly the way in which other needs were met. This illustrates the distinctive way in which teachers conceptualise different kinds of difficulties experienced by pupils and what is expected of them.

We have suggested that the recorded pupils with cognitive difficulties were following a special curriculum in both the primary and secondary school. What emerged from our evidence was that this had evolved in the absence of any clear guidance on how the needs of these pupils would be most appropriately met. A number of primary class teachers said that they were uneasy because they were unsure about the most appropriate curricula for some recorded pupils. As one teacher said about the recorded pupil in her class:

> I'm completely in the dark. I want to teach her life skills such as going to the shop or making a cup of tea, but I might be criticised for denying her the chance to learn reading and writing.

Another class teacher, on the other hand, said she had been appalled when she discovered that the recorded pupil entering her P5 class had never been taught to read. She redressed this which she felt had been to the pupil's benefit but criticised the lack of any guidance. Some learning support staff said that they were also unclear about how to meet the needs of certain recorded pupils most effectively because of a difficulty in operationalising the Record of Needs. As we have commented already this appeared to have been inadequately addressed through the in-service training for learning support staff.

Summary

In this chapter we have described how staff reported the ways in which they try to meet the needs of three main groups of pupils with learning difficulties. Pupils with **short term difficulties** were distinctive in the wide variety of problems they had depending on when and how their normally effective learning had been interrupted. The learning support staff in both the primary and secondary schools had a much smaller role in remedying the difficulties of these pupils than with the pupils experiencing enduring difficulties. Short term difficulties tended to be identified and resolved by mainstream teachers, although it was not always easy for them to articulate how they had done so.

Primary school staff were optimistic that many cognitive difficulties identified could be resolved with extra help, even where the difficulties appeared to be fundamental, for example in reading. The logical strategy for trying to resolve the difficulties of some pupils appeared to be to extract them from the classroom. Primary school staff believed that they were discouraged from extracting pupils because it was contrary to national and regional guidelines. Yet there seemed to be two powerful arguments to justify this strategy. The first was one of effectiveness. Staff cited numerous examples of successful resolution of pupils' learning difficulties. The second argument was that by extracting they were more likely to maintain the same goals for these pupils as those for the generality, although the processes might differ from time to time.

Some of the behavioural, social or emotional difficulties identified by staff were regarded as capable of being resolved, particularly in the early stages of the primary school when they could be addressed within the teacher's normal goals for the whole of the class. In one primary school special provision was made to try to resolve and in some cases prevent short term behavioural difficulties through positive reinforcement strategies. Attempts were also made throughout the school to control those pupils who appeared to have more enduring behavioural difficulties. The involvement of parents was regarded as an important part of this process. Difficulties arising from social, family or emotional problems were often viewed as the responsibility of the secondary guidance staff or the primary headteachers or mainstream staff.

Non-recorded pupils with enduring cognitive difficulties (sometimes associated with disruptive behaviour) were usually seen as unlikely to achieve the same cognitive goals as the generality of pupils. Teachers tried to meet their needs through, for example differentiated materials. These were designed to reduce the impact of fundamental difficulties (such as reading and writing) and to provide more attainable goals for these pupils. Although the pattern was to retain these pupils in mainstream classrooms our evidence, particularly from mainstream teachers, suggested that they had a **special curriculum**, albeit within the same content area as the rest of the class, with highly structured materials and support.

The third group of pupils was those with **Records of Needs.** We stressed that the kinds of help available to those with **physical** difficulties were directed at alleviating their difficulties so they could achieve the same range of cognitive goals as the generality of pupils in the school. Many of the children who were hearing or visually impaired, for example, were seen as capable of similar academic achievements as their non-impaired peers and had been absorbed into the mainstream curriculum relatively easily. Recorded pupils with **cognitive** difficulties, however, followed a **special curriculum** which was highly structured and had distinctively different goals from those for the mainstream classes. The context in which they pursued these goals varied from school to school. In some cases it was a learning centre, in others the curriculum was followed inside mainstream classrooms but was closely supervised by learning support staff or auxiliaries. Staff recognised the benefits of establishing Record of Needs for pupils in making resources more accessible.

In Chapter 5 we discuss the role of learning support within the classroom in meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties.

5

THE ROLE OF LEARNING SUPPORT IN THE CLASSROOM

Within the context of a policy of mainstreaming, it is clear that the responsibility for pupils with learning difficulties must lie ultimately with the class teacher. This is made quite explicit in the HMI report (1978) which states that:

> deep-seated difficulties deriving from the structure and vocabulary of the language employed in teaching, or of a conceptual nature, require to be dealt with in the class or subject context in which they arise. Class and subject teachers cannot escape their responsibility for dealing with them.
>
> (p 22: 4.3)

It is recognised, however, that the range of needs which have to be met within the classroom, which in some cases includes those of recorded pupils, inevitably places great demands on mainstream staff. Learning support teachers, in both primary and secondary schools were expected to ease the burden on them by providing help in a range of ways. The specialist training (Dip SEN) is aimed at preparing the learning support staff for five roles within the school:

- Co-operative teaching
- Direct teaching of pupils with learning difficulties
- Supporting pupils who need to overcome temporary difficulties
- Consultancy: discussing with and advising colleagues
- In-service training

In Chapter 4, we mentioned how they helped in the development of curriculum materials and by extracting children, especially in the primary school. Here we consider the kind of help they provided **within the classroom**. There were considerable differences in the roles played by learning support staff in secondary and primary schools. Fundamentally, secondary learning support staff viewed themselves as having an educative role in a way that was not apparent in the primary. This is worth noting, because in-service training for both sectors stresses the educative or consultant role.

Learning Support in Secondary Classrooms

Mainstream staff throughout the secondary schools indicated an acute awareness of their responsibility to meet the needs of **all** pupils in their class. Nevertheless, they attributed specialist knowledge and skills to the learning support staff which they considered necessary in order to help them to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. Learning support staff, it was emphasised, possessed considerable knowledge about the difficulties of pupils and about what constituted appropriate curricula for them. They were also described as being skilled at adapting tasks to an appropriate level for pupils with learning difficulties and were seen as particularly adept at modifying the design and language used in curriculum materials. These attributes have made the learning support staff valued professionals, with their involvement in the classroom, and in the preparation of learning materials, welcomed. Their role, however, has been seen as **supportive,** helping mainstream staff to cope with the diverse learning needs, abilities and interests of their pupils.

The learning support staff in the secondaries, however, saw things rather differently. With their specialist knowledge and skills, they perceived their role as one of facilitating the professional development of mainstream teachers, helping them to differentiate more effectively among all pupils. They appeared to regard this as a complex and sensitive process involving efforts to shift the attitudes of the mainstream staff through a process of 'evangelism', 'conversion' or 'proselytism'. Their understanding of their relationship with mainstream staff was not, therefore, one of **support** but rather of **educating** staff to identify and meet the needs of pupils. As we shall see below co-operative teaching, at its most effective, fulfilled this educative role.

Co-operative Teaching

A variety of working relationships between the learning support staff and mainstream staff appeared to count as co-operative teaching. At the lowest, and least educative level, co-operative teaching meant that the learning support teacher helped one or two designated pupils in the class to cope with the work set by the mainstream teacher. Here, of course, the learning support teacher was educating the designated pupils. However, there was little opportunity, in this context, to sensitise the mainstream teacher to differentiation in the curriculum as a way of helping all pupils to learn. In this approach to co-operative teaching, the learning support teacher was seen by mainstream staff as an extra pair of hands. The mainstream teacher could devote full attention to the bulk of the class, knowing that the small number of pupils with learning difficulties were being taken care of by the learning support teacher.

Greater possibilities of learning support staff playing an educative role were present in a different kind of approach to co-operative teaching. Here the learning support teacher provided general support for mainstream staff's goals in a particular lesson. This kind of working relationship meant that mainstream staff decided what the appropriate goals were. Learning support staff did not challenge the appropriateness of the goals. Rather they helped a range of pupils in the classroom, not just those identified as having learning difficulties. In this way they could provide feedback on any difficulties experienced by pupils and gently encourage mainstream staff to re-consider their goals.

The most satisfying approach to co-operative teaching, particularly to learning support staff, was one in which learning support and mainstream staff planned and taught lessons jointly. Discussion and debate about what was to be taught and the best ways of teaching it provided the best context for learning support staff to pass on their expertise about learning difficulties to mainstream staff. Indeed some learning support staff reported feeling able to withdraw their support from a subject department after a sustained period of this kind of co-operative teaching. They felt that mainstream teachers had been thoroughly sensitised to the need to plan to take account of the different learning needs of their pupils and that they had become effective in designing differentiated materials and in using a variety of teaching approaches to this end.

Learning support staff in all 16 of the Region's secondary schools were involved in some form of co-operative teaching. The main emphasis tended to be in S1 and S2 and in English and mathematics departments. Mainstream teachers in these two departments also engaged in team teaching from time to time. The Kent Mathematics syllabus was used throughout the Region and its emphasis on individualised learning and departure from whole class teaching perhaps encouraged team teaching in the mathematics department. In English there also seemed to be a tendency towards more individualised, resource based learning and a theme based approach. The extent of the learning support staff's involvement in co-operative teaching in other departments varied from school to school. Where recorded pupils were present, a learning support teacher or auxiliary was usually available specifically to help these pupils. Sometimes their help also extended to non-recorded pupils with learning difficulties in the class.

In each of the case study schools we interviewed a mainstream teacher involved in co-operative teaching and observed a small selection of lessons in which co-operative teaching took place. These were as follows:

Table 5.1 Lessons Observed in the Case Study Schools

Cohort	Description of Lesson	No of Lessons Observed
S1	English	1
S1	Kent Mathematics	4
S2	Kent Mathematics	2
S2	Science	1
S3	Science	1
S1	French	1
S2	French	1
S3	Social Education (taught by learning support teacher)	1
	Total	12

We also observed a group of recorded pupils in music, geography and within the school's learning centre. We should make it clear, however, that this did not constitute an 'observation study'. The lessons fulfilled only an illustrative role, enhancing the data obtained from the interviews.

Co-operative teaching was the most valued of all the kinds of support available to mainstream teachers in meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. This is hardly surprising. Another teacher in the classroom was a direct, immediate and practical help. It was also consistent with the view of learning support staff as subsidiary to mainstream staff.

Learning support staff knew that co-operative teaching was mainstream teachers' preferred strategy for meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. However, they saw it as less effective than the longer term strategy of developing differentiated learning materials. Co-operative teaching was often perceived by learning support teachers as a way of getting a foot in the door of departments and gaining acceptance as a prelude to making full use of their professional skills. In seeking to convert colleagues in as many departments as possible, however, the learning support staff were aware they might spread themselves so thinly across departments that they rendered their efforts ineffective, inhibiting themselves from gaining any control and limiting their potential to fulfil an educative role.

Access to Departments

Learning support teachers obtained access to departments through a careful process of negotiation. One mainstream teacher described the learning support staff as "moles, burrowing away in the departments". Some effected access by communicating information, either in writing or through an oral presentation, about the support available to departments. Other learning support staff elected to approach departments with the offer of support in a more informal way, for example, through staffroom discussions. The process of gaining access to departments did appear to be somewhat one-sided, with few instances cited where mainstream staff had actively sought help. This seems a little puzzling given that the majority of mainstream staff said that they would welcome more involvement in their classes from the learning support staff. Perhaps their reticence in seeking help from the learning support teachers could be attributed to a reluctance to appear inadequate in the eyes of their colleagues throughout the school, by appearing to be unable to meet the needs of all pupils in their class.

It has already been said that learning support staff were recognised as having specialist skills which enable them to deal with pupils with learning difficulties. Yet the learning support teachers' perceived lack of subject specific expertise led to difficulties in gaining access to certain departments. Learning support staff offered support in the form of co-operative teaching to the majority of subject departments across the curriculum. However, in each of the sixteen schools they indicated that a few departments received no learning support because they did not see this as being welcomed. The departments concerned tended to be either the practical subjects, such as technical studies, physical education, and computing or social studies, in particular geography, although there were notable exceptions in some schools. In a recent discussion with learning support staff in the Region, however, it was suggested that it was not the subjects themselves that predisposed the staff to these views, but the subject centredness of the teachers or their traditional attitudes.

In each of the case study secondary schools we interviewed a member of staff from a department in which there was no co-operative teaching. Two of these departments had received help in the past, but this had subsequently been withdrawn, because the learning support staff did not perceive it to be worthwhile. Mainstream staff had taught whole class lessons rather than using teaching methods such as group work or individualised learning where learning support staff could contribute. One learning support teacher described such an experience:

> I wasn't doing anything different from the pupils. We all just sat there listening to him rabbit on. It was just a complete waste of my time.

Understandably the teachers felt that their time could be more profitably spent elsewhere. Help had been offered to the two departments in the other schools. One head of department had indicated that there was no need for help while another had been openly hostile to the learning support staff when help was offered. Each one of these teachers suggested that the learning support staff's lack of expertise in their own subject area made it difficult for them to be of significant help and could in some cases be a hindrance. One pointed out the consequences which can arise when a learning support teacher who does not have adequate expertise of the subject area is in the classroom:

> I was explaining what was happening and all the rest of it, and everything was going fine and the learning support teacher was with me and was taking it all in, and the phone rang. So I'm on the phone, listening to this person explaining - with everything back-to-front and upside-down, of course. I said "Right, forget what the learning support teacher was saying, we'll start again". The learning support teacher took it very well, you know - you've got to be careful - they're not specialists in the subject and they've got to be flexible, and I think that most of the ones that I've worked with have been flexible.

An equally disastrous experience arising from a lack of expertise in a practical subject was described by a learning support teacher:

> I wasn't confident enough to be able to pass on confidence to the child. I was just another hazard in the class. The class teacher threw up his hands in horror, thanked me very much and didn't ask me back!

Clearly the learning support teacher cannot be expert in every area of the curriculum. Yet it is difficult to understand why the learning support teacher's own specialist skills are seen by some staff as inadequate compensation for a lack of subject specific expertise in the subject areas identified. Perhaps, where practical subjects are concerned, because there are fewer demands on the fundamental elements of reading and writing, the skills of the learning support teacher might not be thought necessary. In other cases, such as technical studies, there may have been concern that the learning support teacher's lack of subject specific expertise could be dangerous. It is much more difficult, however, to see why some social subject departments, and in particular some geography departments, did not perceive that the skills of the learning support teacher could complement their own. The explanation for this offered by learning support staff and senior management, that the traditional attitudes and teaching methods of the staff concerned made them unreceptive to new ideas, seems plausible.

In general, mainstream staff who saw the lack of expertise of the learning support staff as an obstacle were, they stressed, concerned that the teacher might be 'shown up' in the class. Learning support staff, however, demonstrated far more resilience than that. As one pointed out:

> It's important to let the child know that you'll find out for him or her, that you'll go and ask the expert rather than send the child.

Indeed, several learning support staff and mainstream staff pointed out that the learning support teacher can be at an **advantage** by not having a specialist knowledge of the subject area in the sense of being more aware of the difficulties the pupil is likely to encounter with the work.

Developing the Teaching Relationship

The most effective teaching relationship, in the view of the learning support staff, was one in which the two members of staff had shared equally in the planning and teaching of the lesson. Inevitably, time constraints restricted opportunities for mainstream and learning support staff to plan lessons jointly, and so often it was the mainstream teachers alone who took the decisions. In so doing, however, they said that they tried to plan to do something that would make best use of the learning support teacher, even if this meant reorganising the timetable for the rest of the week. This usually meant that the mainstream staff tried not to do whole class tasks, led by themselves, which would make the learning support teacher redundant. Even in these circumstances, however, they retained control of what was done.

The learning support staff said that they felt that it was necessary to allow the mainstream teachers to determine the parameters of the lesson because the subject matter was ultimately their responsibility. Furthermore, the learning support staff were prepared to adapt to the particular styles of the mainstream teachers; they believed that their presence in the class could render the mainstream staff apprehensive and so tried to avoid being too obtrusive. In the lessons which we observed the mainstream teacher generally led the lesson and took responsibility for discipline. The learning support teacher usually remained silent when the mainstream teacher was addressing the whole class unless specifically requested by the mainstream teacher, for example, to engage in a piece of dialogue in a French lesson. Their main activity was the provision of help to certain pupils when they were on task. Both learning support staff and mainstream staff indicated that once they overcame the unfamiliarity of working together, the teaching relationship became more relaxed. One mainstream teacher described how his co-operative teaching relationship had developed into one in which each person knew what to expect of the other:

> I lead the lesson normally unless we decide at the start of the lesson that there was some sort of contribution the learning support teacher felt they could make. As the relationship has developed, the learning support teacher has been quite happy to chip in at times and that has not caused any problems. At first the thought of having someone in the room with me caused some apprehension but that gradually wore off. It does depend on the relationship between the two teachers.

Co-operative teaching within the maths department commonly involved two subject specialist teachers each being responsible for a single class with a third 'floating' between the two. The two teachers would give assistance to the pupils where necessary and the third would go to the class which seemed at the time to be busiest, indicated for example by the number of raised hands. Where there was also a learning support teacher in the class, he or she tended to work most with the pupils with learning difficulties. These pupils did not always seek help through the particular system used in the class, but rather were 'visited' periodically by the learning support teacher. This might be seen as undermining, to some extent, the low level of labelling which characterises Kent Mathematics.

We saw a rather different kind of teaching relationship operate in a geography lesson for a class of **recorded pupils**. On this occasion it was the learning support teacher, rather than the mainstream teacher who set the parameters of the lesson. This suggests that it was expertise in special needs and not in geography which was perceived by the teachers as required and highlights the distinctive way in which the mainstream teacher conceptualised the cognitive aims for pupils with learning difficulties.

One mainstream teacher suggested that situations could arise where there was a conflict of interests between themselves and the learning support teacher in the lesson. He explained:

> Difficulties arise when the learning support teacher is perhaps not happy with something. But we may be wanting to link back to a previous knowledge.

This might have arisen because the mainstream teacher had cognitive goals for the pupils which differed from those of the learning support teacher. In such a situation the mainstream teacher insisted on the need to have, as he put it, the casting vote on what was to take place. Learning support staff said that they sometimes found themselves in lessons where the mainstream teacher was doing something of which they were critical, for instance, when they could see ways in which content could be more appropriately taught. Often, however, they felt unable to discuss these with the mainstream staff, either through lack of time or because they perceived that they may give the impression of being negative. This is unfortunate, in the sense that it denies them the opportunity to assert and demonstrate their professional expertise and influences mainstream teachers' perceptions of their role as subordinate.

Which Pupils Got Support?

Our interviews revealed a distinctive difference between learning support staff and mainstream staff in their perceptions of which pupils received support from the former. On the one hand, learning support staff emphasised that they provided help to **any** pupils in the class and not merely to those identified as having learning difficulties. They saw this as important in terms of their credibility both to the staff and the pupils. Furthermore, they argued that it was less likely that pupils with learning difficulties would be stigmatised if learning support staff were seen to be helping all pupils. On the other hand, mainstream teachers valued above all else the help from learning support staff for pupils identified as having learning difficulties. A teacher of computing commented:

> The learning support teacher comes into a third year class to work with one girl who really has problems remembering what she had in the previous lessons. With her it's only just a question of sitting down and going through it. There's a big problem in that you tend to do things for her rather than sit down and get her to load in the word processor. It's difficult to stop yourself when you know there's somebody having problems and needing some help.

Here the learning support teacher was using his specialist knowledge of how to help the pupil remember instructions through practising this exercise. This freed the subject specialist to pursue different goals with the rest of the class.

In the small number of lessons which were observed it was apparent that the learning support teachers most frequently helped pupils identified as having long term difficulties but they also helped other pupils. It is possible, of course, that the value which mainstream teachers, in the co-operative teaching context, put on the contribution made to the needs of the pupils with difficulties, rather than to the generality of the class, may lead to more explicit labelling of pupils. A mainstream teacher described how the pupils themselves select from the help which was available:

> The kids quite quickly split - a bright child with difficulties that the learning support teacher would not be too happy with would just automatically come to me.

This seems to point to very clear labelling going on in the classroom, despite efforts not to do so. A second problem concerns a desire for some shared understanding, among teachers and pupils, of the role of the learning support staff. As one mainstream teacher commented:

> The question arose whether the learning support teacher was a team teacher or a support teacher just for a few pupils. It seemed to me that occasionally she was both which I suppose is alright, although I think it would be better if she was consistently one or the other.

This particular teacher was dissatisfied with the lack of consistency in which pupils received support which made it difficult to predict accurately how the lesson was going to be taught. It illustrates how the mainstream teacher was equally unsure in the co-operative teaching situation

The Effectiveness of Co-operative Teaching

Many among both mainstream staff and learning support staff emphasised that co-operative teaching had become a normal and acceptable part of their professional relationships, and saw advantages of this greater openness in sharing ideas and providing mutual support. Several teachers also said that it helped to motivate them to teach more effectively. As one teacher explained:

> It makes you keep your standards up, or if you are tired, it makes you keep going. There are times when you don't have so much energy or it would be easier to do something else but if you have a teacher there then you have to use her.

Both learning support staff and mainstream staff had very clear and remarkably similar ideas about the conditions for effective co-operative teaching, particularly those concerned with the quality of the teaching relationships. For the learning support teacher they needed to be confident in their knowledge of the subject matter and able to advise their colleagues on the appropriateness of the curriculum. It was also necessary for them to feel they were being fully utilised by the mainstream teacher and not left standing listening to him or her expatiate for long periods. The mainstream teachers said that where the learning support teacher was taking the responsibility for the pupils with learning difficulties and where they were being fully utilised, the relationship was effective. They also said that the learning support teacher's familiarity with the subject matter made their help most effective, particularly if they had previously taught the subject in the mainstream, as was often the case.

The senior staff who were involved in the interviews gave testimony to the effectiveness of the learning support staff, not only in helping to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties, but in improving the quality of teaching in the school. Senior staff thought they did this by generally heightening the sensitivity of mainstream staff to mixed ability teaching. Learning support staff in most schools emphasised that the vote of confidence in them expressed by management in the school and their active endorsement of the importance of the needs of pupils with learning difficulties had helped them to be effective. This had been operationalised by giving the learning support staff control of their own timetable, enabling considerable flexibility in the targeting of support. Further respect for their professionalism was evident in the freedom given to them to liaise with outside agencies, such as educational psychologists without necessarily informing the school's senior management.

Very little was said by mainstream staff and learning support staff about the effectiveness of co-operative teaching in promoting pupil achievement. Perhaps this was because, as we suggested earlier, co-operative teaching was not seen as a way of remedying the pupils' difficulties but rather as a generalised coping strategy. It is worth saying, however, that the establishment of causal links between pupil achievement and particular strategies is always very difficult. One distinctive advantage of co-operative teaching, identified by learning support teachers, was to raise the general profile of the needs of pupils with learning difficulties, resulting in fewer, rather than greater, demands on learning support staff.

To sum up, there were three main approaches to co-operative teaching:

- the learning support teacher was seen as providing help to one or two designated pupils in the class
- the learning support teacher provided general constructive help to many pupils but did not share in lesson planning or challenge significantly the mainstream teacher's goals
- the learning support teacher and mainstream teacher jointly planned the goals of the lesson, the teaching approaches and materials to be used. Both of them taught the lesson

Each of these approaches was seen as effective, although for different reasons. Earlier research (McAlpine, Brown, McIntyre and Hagger, 1988) has demonstrated the large number of goals which teachers have in a lesson. There are goals for the class as a whole, such as that it gets through a particular piece of work, and goals for individual pupils, for example that they answer a question, or take the lead in discussion. Teachers take a wide range of actions to achieve these goals, taking their knowledge of their pupils into account in lesson planning and in teaching. Classroom teaching is busy, highly interactive and characterised by uncertainty about how pupils will respond to the content and methods. In these circumstances, an extra pair of hands in the shape of the learning support teacher is almost bound to be welcome. The presence of a learning support teacher could mean that the mainstream teacher had fewer pupils to be taught. Learning support staff, however, saw themselves as rather more than an extra pair of hands. As we mentioned earlier, they saw their role as an educative one, passing on their specialist skills and knowledge of pupils with learning difficulties to mainstream staff.

The emphasis of learning support staff on their provision of help for **all** pupils in the context of co-operative teaching suggested consistency with an approach which takes as its basis:

- the importance of meeting the individual needs of all pupils
- the idea that there is no essential difference between the characteristics of effective teaching and learning for pupils of low cognitive achievement and those for others
- a rejection of the notion of a special curriculum for those with learning difficulties

In some ways this is surprising. The special curriculum could be seen as sustaining the status and perceived expertise of learning support staff. The more the mainstream curriculum becomes an integrated entity for all pupils, the more the professional position of those who are perceived as specialising in learning difficulties is eroded. As Moon (1989) has argued, 'Removing the boundaries and denying territory presents a real threat'. The view of mainstream staff is more predictable. It seems likely that their self image and professional status depend much less on their expertise with the lowest achievers. They will readily recognise the status of learning support staff. The primary learning support staff seemed less inclined to see themselves in this kind of role in relation to classroom teachers.

In order to maximise the opportunities for an equal partnership between learning support staff and mainstream staff, and for co-operative teaching to involve joint planning and teaching of lessons, it seems to us that the following conditions have to be met:

- time is needed for learning support staff and mainstream staff to develop a shared understanding of the purposes of co-operative teaching
- Non-contact time needs to be made available for learning support staff and mainstream staff to plan lessons jointly
- learning support staff need to feel reasonably confident about their knowledge of the subject matter to be taught

Providing administrative support for an extended notion of co-operative teaching will not in itself guarantee that learning support staff are able to adopt the educative role they aspire towards. Much depends on positive attitudes and trust between mainstream and learning support staff. The learning support staff enjoyed a high level of credibility with mainstream and senior management staff. Given the right kind of administrative support, for example, to help in the production of learning materials, co-operative teaching could become even more effective.

Learning Support in Primary Classrooms

The kind of support for primary teachers in meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties differed considerably from the approaches in the secondary schools which we have just discussed. The primary learning support teachers often found themselves, like their secondary counterparts, fulfilling a supportive role within the classroom. However, there was very little evidence to suggest that they were attempting to adopt an educative role. Furthermore, we reported how the secondary learning support staff often saw their involvement in the classroom as a means of gaining access to departments in the hope of helping to develop learning materials, which they saw as more effective. They were often prepared to accept a limited supportive role within the classroom with longer term strategies in mind. Primary learning support staff, on the other hand, regarded their involvement in the classroom as a significant end in itself. This and extraction were often described as the two most important ways in which they helped class teachers to meet the pupils' needs.

This is interesting, because the specialist training for the primary learning support teachers did not differ substantively from that for secondary staff in terms of the educative role they were exhorted to fulfil. Perhaps one reason for their reluctance to adopt such a stance was the tendency of class teachers to view learning support staff as not having any specific expertise in relation to meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. Primary class teachers were much more inclined than secondary mainstream teachers to see themselves as possessing the necessary expertise (detailed knowledge of the pupils and their needs, skills in diagnostic procedures and differentiation) to meet the learning needs of all pupils in their class. Learning support staff concurred with this view, arguing that it was the class teachers' day-to-day contact with the pupils which had led them to accumulate this expertise. Learning support staff were seen as providing **essentially the same kind** of help to pupils with learning difficulties as the class teacher. The main difference was that the learning support teacher targeted certain pupils for help, either by extracting them from the class or by providing intensive help within the class. Understandably each saw the role of the learning support teacher as one in which the class teacher was given extra **assistance** in one form or another.

Access to certain subject departments had been a difficulty for secondary learning support staff. Primary learning support teachers had also met with initial hostility from class teachers to their offers of help. It seemed, however, that this did not reflect conflicting notions of professional expertise required to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. More simply, class teachers appeared to be reticent about the presence of another teacher in the classroom. Learning support staff said that almost all of the initial reluctance had given way to gratitude for the extra assistance, although some class teachers still regarded extraction as a preferable strategy.

Because of the optimism primary staff tended to have that many of the pupils' difficulties could be resolved with early help, there was a concentration of learning support in the lower stages of the primary school which often diminished at the opposite end. As we mentioned in Chapter 2, learning support staff welcomed the opportunities to work with the young pupils, thereby increasing the likelihood of success, but the lack of support for older pupils is, perhaps, a source of concern.

The most common kind of learning support occurring within the classrooms, of all twelve primary schools was where the learning support teacher assisted a few pupils experiencing fundamental difficulties such as in reading or numeracy. Typically, for example, the learning support teacher would come into the class at an agreed time and listen to some of the children read, beginning with the poorest. Whereas learning support staff in the secondary schools tried to extend their involvement in subjects across the curriculum, the primary teachers tended to help only with the fundamental areas. It was unusual, for example, for a learning support teacher to provide assistance in environmental studies. When joint planning in other areas of the curriculum did take place, it most usually involved the class teacher identifying the pupils and areas of difficulty in which help was needed, with perhaps the learning support teacher making one or two suggestions. There was, however, little evidence of the class teacher's goals being altered significantly.

Although the tendency was to help the pupils identified as having fundamental difficulties, some mainstream and learning support staff said that they often tried to vary the focus of the help of the learning support staff. As one learning support teacher said:

> I'll often work from the top end of the group. It helps to stimulate them and lets the teacher work work with the poorer ones.

Similarly a mainstream teacher said:

> If she came in and I was working with the poor group, she would walk round the rest and help wherever she could. I don't think it's good for her to take them all the time because the class teacher loses contact with them and you're not quite sure where they are or what they're doing.

This seemed to suggest a rejection of a special curriculum, in the sense that pupils with learning difficulties were not viewed as requiring specialist teaching. It reinforces the notion of learning support staff as providing essentially the same skills and knowledge as the regular primary teacher. To emphasise this point, it is worth pointing out that a secondary learning support teacher would be unlikely to be helping with a top Standard Grade group in, for example, mathematics or foreign languages.

Summary

The role of learning support in the secondary and primary schools appeared to differ considerably. Secondary learning support staff sought to fulfil an **educative** function, in which ideally they could share in the planning and teaching of lessons and provide help to **all** pupils in the class, not just those identified as having learning difficulties. They sought to share their own expertise with mainstream teachers to enable them to meet the needs of the pupils in their class effectively. They were often unsuccessful in their attempts and were often constrained to adopt a role which was **supportive**, in which they helped those pupils identified as having enduring difficulties. This seemed to have occurred because of the tendency of mainstream staff to view the learning support teachers as having specialist knowledge and skills in relation to pupils with enduring learning difficulties, rather than as capable of making a contribution to meeting the learning needs of all pupils. Learning support staff were generally willing to adopt a supportive role if necessary. They saw it as at least providing them with a foot in the door of subject departments from which they hoped to progress to more substantial involvement.

As far as the primary schools were concerned, there was little evidence that the learning support staff were fulfilling any kind of educative role in relation to their mainstream colleagues. This appeared to reflect the confidence of both groups in the class teachers' expertise in enabling them to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties, with the assistance of the learning support teacher. This did not seem to match the kind of role for which they were prepared in their specialist training. Nevertheless, it seemed that the support available to class teachers was regarded as effective by both mainstream and learning support teachers in terms of the success in resolving pupils' difficulties. It might also help to avoid the establishment of a special curriculum in which pupils with learning difficulties were viewed as requiring specialist teaching.

In Chapter 6 we consider other kinds of support available to schools in meeting needs.

77

6

SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS: PARENTAL AND PROFESSIONAL

In Chapters 4 and 5 we concentrated on the various strategies used by primary and secondary staff in meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. In this chapter we focus on the help available outwith school, in particular on the roles played by parents and educational psychologists.

Parents

It is generally accepted that there is room for improvement in home-school communication. Many studies have shown that parents would welcome more information about what their children learn, their children's progress and ways of helping their children succeed (Atkin, Bastiani and Good, 1988; Bastiani, 1987). However, it has also been suggested that it is difficult to translate parents' interest in the education of their children into direct and sustained contact with their children's teachers (Macbeth, 1989). It seems that the trust in the professional expertise of teachers, held by most parents, can operate as a barrier. Parents say they are reluctant 'to interfere' in their children's schooling or are worried that they could be transmitting inaccurate information and thereby inhibiting their children's progress (Tizard and Hughes, 1984). Indeed, even the recently established school boards, which have a statutory responsibility to communicate with parents, have had only limited success in this area, despite strenuous efforts (Munn and Holroyd, 1989).

We were interested in whether parents of primary and secondary children experiencing learning difficulties felt well informed about the nature of these difficulties and how the school was trying to meet their needs. We also wanted to know if they were involved in any programmes offered by the schools to help their children at home.

Parents of Secondary School Pupils

Staff in all sixteen secondary schools said that they tried to keep parents of pupils with enduring learning difficulties informed of what they were trying to do to meet their needs. They did this either by writing to the parents, or through parents' evenings. Attempts were made to encourage parents to contact the school if they wished to discuss any aspect of their child's progress. The parents, however, did not always respond.

In the case studies of the secondary schools we interviewed a total of fourteen parents of pupils with learning difficulties. Two of the pupils had recorded cognitive learning difficulties and one had recorded physical difficulties. The other parents who were interviewed had children with enduring non-recorded difficulties. We asked the school to identify the parents for us and they indicated that they had selected those who might provide us with a range of views. The schools chose to make contact with the parents on our behalf, and they were given the option of being interviewed at home or in school. We felt that we had obtained a sample of parents of pupils with differing needs and from a range of home backgrounds which provided us with varied perspectives.

All of the parents of secondary pupils interviewed had contact with the school through parents' evenings and had met the learning support staff to discuss their child's needs. A number of the parents praised the efforts the school had made to encourage parental contact but suggested that the difficulty for many parents in responding arose from uneasiness about schools in general. One parent commented:

> I think from our day in school you just didn't do these things - you know parents were sent for when there was something vitally wrong, when you had misbehaved. The teachers were really quite imposing and yet everybody couldn't be nicer to us when we do come. Even the headteacher says good morning.

In general parents felt that they were well informed about their children's learning difficulties and about how learning needs were being met. They were full of praise for the work and sympathetic approach of learning support staff. Despite the learning support teachers' stated wish for greater involvement of parents in their children's schooling and parents' desire to be involved, there were few arrangements designed to encourage such involvement. Staff in one of the case study schools had devised a special homework scheme to promote an active role for parents and we report on this later in the chapter. First of all, however, we consider the extent of parental contact in the primary schools.

Parents of Primary School Pupils

Staff in the primary schools said they tried to establish informal links with parents and encouraged them to visit the school whenever they wished to discuss any matter. In most schools parents had responded, but staff in a few schools identified considerable apathy among parents. In general there were few structured opportunities for parents to be actively involved in helping with their school work, although we are aware that developments are now taking place in this area. Before considering parental involvement in meeting their children's learning needs, let us consider first how parents were informed that their child was experiencing a learning difficulty.

It is important to stress that, particularly in the early primary stages, teachers identified a fairly large proportion (40-50%) of pupils as having difficulties. Many of these children were likely to overcome their initial problems and so staff informed parents that their child was receiving help only if this was over a sustained period of time. It was unusual for staff to inform parents that their child was receiving learning support because of a short term difficulty.

Teachers said that they often had to quell parents' fears over their child's apparent lack of progress. One class teacher said:

> It's hard for them when they see the neighbour's wee girl is reading and their child isn't. You just try to tell them that the children don't all learn at the same rate.

Staff said that they also found it difficult to convince parents of how the differentiated curriculum was aimed at meeting their child's individual needs. Parents, they suggested, seemed to expect the same curriculum as they themselves had experienced and were surprised, for example, at the absence of rote learning of tables.

In the case studies of the primary schools we interviewed four parents of non-recorded pupils with learning difficulties and one parent of a hearing impaired pupil who was recorded. Once again we asked the school to identify the parents for us and the schools chose to make contact with the parents on our behalf. In two of the schools, however, staff seemed to experience difficulty in obtaining access to parents on our behalf. Some parents had been unwilling to be interviewed while others did not keep the appointment. There were no such difficulties in obtaining access to parents in the third school. Interestingly one of the reasons for selecting this school had been its involvement of parents in meeting the needs of pupils with behavioural difficulties, which we reported in Chapter 4.

In most primary schools parents had regular contact with the schools through parents evenings. Some of the parents were involved in helping within the classrooms. This involved either contributing a particular area of expertise, for example music or craftwork, or helping the class teacher generally. Staff in a few schools, however, identified apathy among parents, making the familiar comment that "You never see the parents you want to see". This raises fundamental questions about the nature and structure of home - school relationships which are outwith the scope of this study. It is worth mentioning, however, that it is easy for teachers to assume parental apathy or lack of interest in their child's schooling as an explanation for non-involvement. This, however, diverts attention from potential school and teacher barriers to such involvement.

The three parents of primary pupils whom we interviewed said that they felt well informed of their child's difficulties. They were aware of how the school was trying to meet the needs of their child and commended the efforts of the staff.

Below we compare how well informed parents of the non-recorded and the recorded children were about the nature of their learning difficulties and how their needs were being met.

Parents of the Non-recorded pupils

Only one of the parents of the secondary pupils we interviewed did not appear to be aware that her child was experiencing learning difficulties, despite attendance at parents' evenings and meetings with the learning support teachers. The others identified not only the nature of the pupils' difficulties, but also demonstrated a knowledge of how their needs were being met. Parents of the secondary pupils said they knew that it was school policy to try to meet the child's needs in the mainstream, rather than extract them and they were wholeheartedly in support of this, because they thought it reduced the possibility of stigma. They also spoke positively of the individualised approaches to learning in trying to meet their child's needs, apparently understanding their child to be following a mainstream curriculum, rather than a special curriculum. As one parent said:

> They can work at their own level, they do it to whatever suits the child, so there's no actual real pressure on them.

Parents of the secondary pupils seemed to share the mainstream staff's view of the learning support staff as fulfilling a **supportive** role in the classroom. A number of parents described how the learning support staff operated in mainstream classrooms in a way which helped the child, but at the same time avoided labelling them as having learning difficulties. One parent, for example, said:

> I think the learning support teacher goes round the whole class. She's actually part of the class and they're not brought out. It's all linked in. He doesn't mind it. She says she actually goes into the class and she goes round and helps them all, not only the ones she's there to see.

Most of the parents of the secondary pupils saw the learning support teacher as fulfilling a special role in their child's education which they thought had given them a great deal of confidence. They welcomed the friendly and supportive relationship which the learning support teachers seemed to have with their children. They also reported that their children received a great deal of encouragement from learning support staff to approach them to seek help with any difficulties. Most of the parents said that they tried to echo this encouragement at home, for example, by suggesting that the child's siblings could also seek help from the learning support teacher. One or two parents, however, were concerned that their child might be something of a burden either to learning support staff or mainstream staff, by seeking help on a regular basis. One parent commented:

> The learning support teacher has asked her to come along any time and let him know when she needs help, and she's said she will, when she's really stuck. We've sort of got through to her that she must try first, she must be sure that she can't do something before she asks for help, so that she's not a pest in the class, because we don't want that.

Most of the parents interviewed said that when they attended the parents' evening, they were satisfied that the mainstream staff were sympathetic to their child's needs, and were trying to do their best to help them. As one parent commented:

> They say he's always asking questions because he can't understand it right, but they do help him. They realise that his problem is reading and they say he does it no problem if you read the question to him.

Another parent praised what he saw as the realistic attitude of the French teacher:

> He's sitting through these classes and probably hates it. You see he's not that good at it. He's got another year to do at it but she's not going to push him because she says there's more to life than learning French.

Another parent differentiated between what he saw as subject-centred and pupil-centred teachers to whom he had spoken:

> Some subject teachers are possibly taking their subject first and not really thinking about the children. The science teacher made a comment, he said he wasn't going to make a scientist. As if that's you written off. You know, he's enjoying the work but he's not going to make the grade, as it were and yet the maths teacher would focus on him. He had a specialised programme which was geared particularly for him and the fact that he was doing something else from the rest of the class didn't make any difference. You know he was really doing just what was best for him.

It is interesting that one parent saw that the needs of his child were being met as a result of not being pushed by the French teacher. The science teacher, on the other hand, was viewed by the parent as failing to meet the child's needs by not stretching the child. What is important here, however, is that each of these parents had a clear view about the appropriateness of the subject teachers' responses to their child's needs. If they are not given an opportunity to express such views, then they are unlikely to feel involved in meeting their child's learning needs.

Three of the parents were critical of the responses they obtained from some of the mainstream staff at the parents' evening. This was either because they thought that they did not show an awareness of the pupil's learning difficulties, or seemed to be intolerant of them. One parent commented:

> The English teacher was ignoring the fact that he didn't know what a basic sentence was, saying that was the learning department's priority, you know, not hers. The geography teacher took it as cheek when he said he didn't know what a sentence was. But he kept putting in his work, "could you write in sentences?" There's now a personality clash with both of them because one sees it as cheek and the other sees it as making a fool of her.

In the primary schools each of the parents of the non-recorded pupils whom we interviewed had been informed that their child was receiving help from the learning support teacher. They were aware of the particular area which was being targeted, for example numeracy, and knew that their child was either extracted or helped within the class. They saw both strategies as effective and, above all, emphasised the close relationship between their child and the learning support teacher. One parent, for example, said:

> He really gets on well with her and likes being taken out of the class or getting extra help from her when she comes in. She's obviously a very nice person.

The learning support staff in the primary schools were viewed by parents as having a supportive role either in the classroom or when they extracted. Indeed the primary learning support staff seemed to have communicated to parents that this was precisely the role they tried to adopt within the school. This is quite distinct from their counterparts in the secondary school, who aspired to more of an educative role and tried to make this known to parents.

As far as the kind of curriculum experienced by the primary pupils was concerned, parents obviously did not have the same opportunities to compare teaching approaches as parents of secondary pupils. Primary parents had access to the class teacher, the learning support teacher and the headteacher and so could not make the kinds of comparisons we reported the parents of secondary pupils as making. Nevertheless, they had formed some general impressions of how their child was being educated. They knew that all pupils experienced a differentiated curriculum and saw the benefits of enabling each child to work at his or her own level. One or two parents, however, suspected that their child had been disadvantaged because they had not undergone the kind of rote learning, for example of tables, which they themselves had experienced. They suggested that this might have prevented certain difficulties from occurring. Regardless of whether or not the parents had any grounds for concern, perhaps the lack of opportunities for parents to discuss this with staff is a source of concern.

As we reported in Chapter 3, parents of primary school children were usually involved in the initial identification of their child's learning difficulties, by informing staff of any concerns at the enrolment stage. This appeared to have been made easier in the school with its own nursery in the sense that the pre-school contact with parents tended to be sustained as the child entered the primary school and parents were more likely to volunteer information. It was unusual for parents of older children to be involved in identification in any significant way. In one of the primary schools, however, staff involved parents in the identification of pupils with learning difficulties of all ages. Parents were invited to a meeting with the headteacher, the learning support teacher and the class teacher to discuss the child's needs and strategies for meeting them. Targets for the pupil were agreed upon, with at least one of these involving the parents.

Parents of the Recorded Pupils

As we said earlier, parents of recorded pupils are involved in the opening of the Record of Needs for their child, the annual review meetings and the Future Needs Assessment. All three parents of recorded pupils in secondary schools and the parent of the primary hearing impaired pupil whom we interviewed said that they felt fully involved in this process and able to express their own views about their children's needs. This small sample of parents felt well informed about the nature of their children's difficulties and saw the Record of Needs as a source of protection for their child, entitling them to specialist help.

The parents of the recorded pupils also thought they were well informed about how their needs were being met. They emphasised the friendly and supportive nature of the learning support staff which had been reported to them by their children. They said they saw enormous benefits to their children, in terms of confidence, of there being at least one person in the school with whom they could identify. The parent of the secondary pupil with physical difficulties praised the enormous amount of 'running around' by the learning support teacher which enabled the pupil to get to various classes throughout the school. The parents of the two secondary pupils with cognitive difficulties, however, had reservations about their children being taught, for part of the time, in the school's learning centre. The parents reported their children saying that they were labelled as handicapped by attending the learning centre. Nevertheless, for one of the parents, the learning centre was seen a having a vital role in meeting her child's needs. Interestingly, it was not the child's cognitive needs which were identified. Rather, the learning centre was seen as protecting her child from the 'hurly burly' of school life:

> As long as he is in the learning centre he is to a certain extent protected. The minute he goes into the mainstream class he is just a big fish in the ocean and discipline will come his way in the way it will come to other children. Whereas in the learning centre, ok, people will not get him out of a problem but people will to a certain extent help him.

Another parent did refer to the learning centre as a way of meeting her child's learning needs but believed that it was not sufficiently demanding:

> I still feel that she sort of finds it boring, not quite as stimulating as in the mainstream where they were doing some exotic things. She enjoys working in the kitchen so, I mean, that's just one subject, but I think there are a number of others where she could perhaps have just done with that bit extra.

The mainstream provision was also perceived by this parent as having inadequacies:

> If you're going to run them into a mainstream school as well as the learning centre, you've got to have the support in every class, you know, if they're going to science, you can't sort of send someone there to one lesson, and the next three they can't make it because there's a meeting. And I think this is what happened - there were so many meetings going on, so therefore there isn't a backup. You've got to have that constant pattern, where there's always someone there.

The parent of the primary pupil with hearing impairment praised the efforts of the school staff to meet her child's needs. She thought her child had benefited from the high level of integration in the school. However, she suggested that there were occasions where the extent of the integration often masked the demands placed on hearing impaired pupils. The parent expressed dissatisfaction that the level of speech therapy, detailed in the Record of Needs, had not been provided. This had occurred as a result of staffing shortages, but the parent felt that she had been let down by the caveat in the Record of Needs which "meant that the Region doesn't have to provide what is stated in the Record of Needs". It appears, however, that the Region have sought to remove this caveat.

In summary, the parents of recorded children felt well informed both about the nature of their children's learning difficulties and the ways in which they were being catered for. They knew about the Region's policy of integrating recorded pupils into mainstream schooling and were full of praise for the efforts of learning support staff to help their children. The formal procedures of opening a Record of Needs, annual review meetings and assessment of future needs were an important channel of communication between parents and the school, although other forms of communication, such as parents' evenings and pupil progress reports were also used. The parents to whom we spoke appeared to be well informed of their child's needs and what the school was trying to do to meet them. This is heartening evidence of effective communication with parents. However, for communication to be even more effective, parents need to be able to share their concerns with teachers. It is noteworthy that the parents having reservations about the approach of some mainstream staff felt able to discuss these reservations with us, but not with the staff concerned or learning support staff. Communication is not an end in itself but a way of encouraging parents to take a more active part in their children's schooling.

Parental Involvement in Meeting Pupils' Needs

In Chapter 4 we reported on how the involvement of parents was a specific strategy, adopted in one primary school, to meet the needs of pupils with behavioural difficulties. Apart from this specific example and the one secondary school which we report on below, very few parents of either primary or secondary pupils were involved in any schemes, such as paired reading or joint homework, designed to help their children at home. It is perhaps easier to understand why parents of secondary pupils were not involved. It will be remembered that learning support teachers believed that enduring difficulties in reading, writing and numeracy were unlikely to be overcome at the secondary stage of the child's education. The emphasis was on finding ways round these difficulties so that pupils could cope with the normal school curriculum. Parents, perhaps, were seen as not having the skills that were necessary to help in this context.

As far as parents of primary pupils were concerned, the reasons for their lack of involvement were less clear. The kinds of help provided for pupils with learning difficulties, even of a fundamental nature, could, it seems, be provided at home. Staff, however, did not appear to be willing to establish this kind of role for parents. Perhaps the more generalised kind of expertise in relation to pupils with learning difficulties (shared by mainstream and learning support teachers) which seems to exist in the primary schools is more difficult to let go of. Parents themselves seemed to take very few initiatives in asking staff how they could help their children.

In general most of the parents in primary and secondary schools said that they were not involved in any specific way in trying to meet the needs of their child. In one of the secondary case study schools, however, the learning support staff had made particular efforts to involve the parents of pupils with learning difficulties through a special homework scheme. Pupils were given an individual package of work to complete at home. This generally involved reading, some exercises in sentence construction or a piece of writing. Parents were asked to check the work and sign that it had been completed and they were given general advice on how they might help the child as follows:

> The simple task of listening to his/her reading from a book (supplied by LD Dept) will establish your interest in their work. Hopefully this will soon become a regular occurrence; you can then develop this passive listening into a more involved discussion of pictures and story, going back over difficult words and generally encouraging and praising as you work your way through a book. (This last point is perhaps the most important one: all our work could be in vain if a child is unhappy about the extra work and worried about making mistakes).

As well as helping the pupils to make progress, learning support staff saw this as a way of establishing a strong link with the parents, extending the picture they had of the pupil and creating confidence in the parents in what the school was doing for their child. They thought they had been successful with some of the parents, although a number had failed to ensure that the work was returned, despite written reminders from the learning support staff.

All four parents whom we interviewed from this school said that they did help their child at home and thought they had witnessed progress as a result. One parent described how he had helped:

> He got a book to read and one or two questions to answer on each chapter. We had a quick read at it, and made sure he understood what the questions were. We made him answer one himself, then he'd bring it back and we'd go over them to see if he'd got the answers correct and we'd maybe make his sentence a wee bit better than he had and correct his spelling. It's not that difficult that he can't manage it and it's not putting any extra pressure on him at home. We find it's working.

Another parent said she carried out paired reading with her child, a process whereby the parent begins reading and the child nudges the parent when he or she wants to take over. The parent had learned about this from a book and thought that it had helped the child considerably. She also said that she worked with her child for two hours every evening. Learning support staff were aware of this and were concerned, as they saw a danger in parents placing undue pressure on the child through homework schemes such as theirs. One parent said that her own limitations rendered her rather anxious about correcting her child's work:

> I do read through this extra work he gets. I don't correct it in any way. I just don't feel it's my place to correct it. Initially I tried to help him with spelling or the layout. Got him to re-read them and see where his errors were, but after a few weeks I thought - no, he'd be better taking it from his teachers. English was my poor subject at school and I just feel they're trained to do that and I might tell him something that's not just correct .

Each of the parents said that their involvement at home had given them a good insight into what their child was doing at school and the kinds of things they were achieving and had made them feel that they were contributing in some way.

Parents of pupils with short term social or emotional difficulties were sometimes contacted by primary headteachers or by guidance staff, and informed of what the school was trying to do to help the child. Where staff thought that the pupil's difficulties were connected with the home, the parents were invited to the school to discuss this, in some cases with the help of the educational psychologist. In this context parents were partly the focus of the help, rather than participating in helping their child. We turn now to the kinds of professional support which was available to schools.

Professional Support

We have already mentioned that the educational psychologists played a key role in the identification of recorded pupils. They also monitored how their needs were met through the annual review meetings which they chaired. Staff in both primary and secondary schools reported that the educational psychologists had been of considerable help in providing resources, such as special equipment for pupils with learning difficulties, particularly if they had a Record of Needs. Staffing allocation to schools was authorised from within the Regional Psychological Service, by the Adviser for Pupils with Learning Difficulties. This included learning support staff, auxiliary staff, and teachers of the hearing and visually impaired. Staff in schools thought that in general their requests for extra staffing were treated very fairly, but thought they were more successful when they made requests in relation to recorded pupils.

The educational psychologists were said to be most commonly involved in providing support to both primary and secondary schools in dealing with social and emotional difficulties. They usually liaised with primary headteachers or secondary guidance staff on a regular basis, providing advice to the staff or counselling to the pupil or parents. Guidance staff found the contact useful generally and thought that their counselling skills were of considerable value. They were also reported to be effective in helping guidance staff to meet with parents.

A number of staff in primary schools had experienced the 'Batpack' staff development, provided by the educational psychologists. As we report later in this chapter, they found this helpful in meeting the needs of pupils with behavioural difficulties. However, there seemed to be a lack of clarity among guidance staff about the kind of help they could expect from the educational psychologists in relation to pupils with cognitive difficulties. The staff said that they did not expect the psychologists to have a magic wand which they could wave, but felt that they did not offer them very much in the form of practical help on how to deal with particular pupils. One guidance teacher commented:

> We're looking for suggestions for how we could tackle things, maybe an idea that we haven't tried before. Maybe it's our fault, maybe we don't refer them to the psychologist soon enough, but I think we try to cope with the problems ourselves and it's only when we're not coping we call in the expert.

The educational psychologists, on the other hand, said that they often felt that staff in schools looked to them for immediate solutions to problems, which they were unable to offer. This suggested to us that there was a mismatch of expectations between these two groups of professionals. The educational psychologists did not have a substantial role in the day to day meeting of the needs of the recorded or non-recorded pupils with cognitive difficulties in either the primary or secondary schools. This also seemed to reflect a mismatch of expectations between the learning support staff and the educational psychologists. Learning support staff said that the psychologists' unfamiliarity with the secondary school curriculum and their lack of contact with the pupils limited what they could offer, but indicated that they were unclear as to what they could expect from them. This does, to some extent, reflect the confidence of staff in school that they are doing as much as they possibly can to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. A number of primary and secondary learning support teachers said that the educational psychologists would benefit from going into the classroom and observing pupils. When they did seek help, learning support staff said they were looking mainly for confirmation that what they were doing was appropriate and for some positive support for their efforts. However, the psychologists again said that when they were consulted, they felt that a 'magic cure' was demanded from them. They also reported a difficulty in trying to get staff in schools to shift away from the 'pupil deficit' model and look to the curriculum as a source of learning difficulties.

As the school staff pointed out, the educational psychologists are usually contacted as a last resort, when all else appears to have failed, and this must inevitably heighten expectations of what could be achieved. Perhaps one way of bringing expectations closer together would be for the educational psychologists to participate openly in discussions with school staff about the kind of professional relationship they each see as desirable. This might, for example, enable them to explore to what extent the educational psychologists can contribute to the curriculum for pupils experiencing different kinds of difficulties. If not, perhaps they could decide upon the kinds of help which would be most valuable and feasible.

The Record of Needs was a regarded as instrumental in facilitating liaison with other outside agencies, such as medical practitioners, social workers, speech therapists and physiotherapists on behalf of recorded pupils. Staff regretted that non-recorded pupils could not benefit to the same extent from these services. Staff in some of the schools reported that the location of their school made it difficult to obtain help from certain agencies which had not been decentralised to the same extent as the Regional Psychological Service.

In-service for Learning Support Staff and Mainstream Staff

The regional policy on learning difficulties, adopted in 1983, was innovative and the rapid training of staff in primary and secondary schools was necessary in order to implement it. There have been three main areas of in-service support:

- A course leading to a Diploma in learning difficulties for learning support teachers
- 'Batpack', an in-service course delivered by the educational psychologists and aimed at all staff
- In-service for mainstream staff provided by learning support staff

The Diploma in Learning Difficulties (now Dip SEN) was written jointly by the Regional Council and a college of education. It was based on both the HMI report and the Region's policy, taking the curriculum to be the primary source of learning difficulties. The course was taught mainly within the Region to minimise costs and involved both face-to-face teaching and distance learning, with the aim of preparing learning support staff to fulfil five professional roles: these are co-operative teaching, direct teaching of pupils with learning difficulties, supporting pupils who need to overcome temporary difficulties, consultancy to mainstream colleagues (the 'educative' role) and in-service training. Learning support staff were facilitated in the educative role by being assigned tasks during their Diploma course which placed them in this relationship with their mainstream colleagues. They were also given the task of developing a whole school policy for learning difficulties. Over sixty learning support staff in the Region's primary and secondary schools now have the Diploma and those whom we interviewed said that they found the course tremendously helpful. They reported that access to departments was, in many cases, legitimised by the fulfilment of course requirements. Indeed the most valuable aspect of the course for most teachers was gaining confidence in the educative role with their mainstream colleagues. This is interesting since, as we discussed in Chapter 5, this was the role in which they had not always been particularly successful. Furthermore, learning support staff in secondary schools were typically not involved in helping pupils overcome temporary difficulties. We also suggested that while the primary and secondary learning support teachers experienced similar training, they seemed to be trying to fulfil distinctively different roles in relation to their mainstream colleagues.

The 'Batpack' staff development package was aimed at improving strategies for meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. Headteachers in some schools indicated that they would have preferred to deliver the package themselves as this would have allowed them greater flexibility in taking account of other staff development needs. The educational psychologists, however, argued that they were better placed to deliver the package themselves.

Many of the learning support staff had provided in-service training relating to pupils with learning difficulties for their mainstream colleagues, one of the roles which the diploma course aimed to equip staff to fulfil. They had covered such aspects as language across the curriculum and differentiation and mainstream staff said they found this helpful, welcoming the fact that it had been provided by the learning support staff, rather than from outwith the school. It appeared to be the only form of help available to mainstream staff, as they indicated that they had received no guidelines from the general advisory service on meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. The pressures of Standard Grade were reported to be still weighing heavily upon mainstream staff, demanding the majority of their non-teaching time and in-service commitments.

Summary

Learning support staff in both the primary and secondary schools went to great lengths to communicate with parents of pupils with learning difficulties, but did not always find this easy. The parents whom we interviewed said that they had a good relationship with the school. They had a great deal of praise for the way the teachers were trying to meet the needs of their child, and were knowledgeable about the nature of mainstream provision. Some reservations about the learning centre were expressed by the parents of the recorded pupils. Other parents of non-recorded pupils were critical of one or two mainstream secondary teachers for their lack of awareness or tolerance of their child's needs, or because they did not seem to them to be meeting what they perceived their child's needs to be. There appeared to be few structured opportunities for parents to air these concerns with staff in school, and this seemed to indicate a measure of control over the extent of parental involvement with the school. If parents are to be fully utilised in meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties, then they must be made to feel that their views on the school curriculum are being listened to. The involvement of parents in meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties, attempted in one school, was thought by the parents to have been successful, in the sense that they felt that they had made a contribution to their child's learning. Otherwise, however, few attempts were made by school staff to involve parents in meeting their child's needs at home.

Our data suggest that there is a mismatch of expectations between staff in both primary and secondary schools and the educational psychologists concerning what the latter group could offer. As a consequence, staff in schools felt dissatisfied with the help they had sought while the psychologists were frustrated by what appeared to them to be unrealistic demands. Both groups would clearly benefit from participation in discussions which brought their expectations more closely together.

The in-service training provided was generally well received. The praise for the Diploma course masks the differences between the ideal role of learning support staff conveyed through the course, and the implementation of that role. It also conceals the rather different interpretations of the role of learning support staff by teachers in the primary and secondary schools. Nevertheless, that learning support and mainstream staff feel generally well equipped to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties in mainstream settings is no small achievement.

In Chapter 7 we turn to the distinctive needs of the more able pupils.

7

MORE ABLE PUPILS

The justification for making special educational provision for more able pupils is based on four main arguments. One relates to the individual rights of the child. The remaining three arguments are social, concerning the potential contribution to society of the more able child, the wastage of talent and human capital if they do not receive special treatment and the need to exploit such talent to resolve future world problems (Jonathan, 1986). The assertion by Warnock that the more able can be considered to have Special Educational Needs has been largely accepted and as Denton and Postlethwaite (1985) note, provision for the more able has now gained respectability. Under the terms of the Act a more able child could be recorded, but Thomson, Riddell and Dyer (1989) came across only one incidence of this in Scotland within a three year data set.

In one of the secondary case study schools, a member of the learning support staff had specific responsibility for co-ordinating the identification and meeting of the needs of more able pupils. This arose initially from a specific interest of the staff member, in fulfilment of the diploma course requirements, but was later adopted as school policy by senior management in the school, with some financial support from the Region. Staff said that the general aim of provision for the more able was to provide them with goals which would challenge and stimulate them, contending that equal opportunity did not equate with equal education. Beyond this, they did not articulate what they saw as appropriate educational goals for more able pupils.

Identification of More Able Pupils in the Secondary

Staff in the case study school preferred to use the broader conceptualisation of more able pupils rather than gifted, which they saw as too restrictive. Learning support staff had grappled with the problems of both defining and identifying the more able pupil, but did not claim to have resolved them. It is easy to recognise specific ability in, for example, music but far more difficult to adduce criteria to determine a child who is more able generally. In a discussion of giftedness, Jonathan suggests four definitions:

- Overall cognitive ability
- Creativity
- Specific cognitive talent, eg in mathematics or music
- Non-cognitive ability, eg sporting prowess, social giftedness

She points out, however, that the most effective definition is one which relies least on achievement, for example in test scores, and most on cognitive or personality factors which can be shown as prerequisites for achievement.

In the case study school more able pupils were identified by a standardised test (NFER AH2/AH3) of general reasoning ability, verbal and numerical skills, administered to the entire S1 cohort in November each year. Mainstream teachers were also asked to identify high ability in their subjects and the two sets of information were compared. Where there was a marked discrepancy, a retest was carried out to detect a test error and if there was none, the learning support teacher investigated the discrepancy among her departmental colleagues, with the mainstream teachers, guidance staff or possibly the child or the parents. The learning support teacher adopted these procedures, recognising of the limitations of both standardised tests and the mainstream teachers' identification of more able pupils. The learning support teacher was aware that such tests could not identify pupils with giftedness in leadership, creative or innovative thinking, giftedness in the visual or performing arts or psychomotor ability. In addition, the teacher's own investigations within the school had confirmed that there appeared to be a greater number of more able pupils than had been identified by mainstream staff. She also noted that the teachers tended to base their identification on class assessments, rather than their own general knowledge of the pupils' abilities. Such a judgement is, of course, centred on achievement, rather than on potential, cited as the rationale for making provision for the more able. By using both methods of identification, however, it was thought that their weaknesses could be counteracted to some extent and a larger number of pupils could be identified.

One pupil had scored very highly on the test, but had not been identified by mainstream staff as more able. The learning support teacher thought that this was because he was very quiet in class. Another pupil who had scored highly on the test had been identified by learning support staff, mainstream staff and staff in the primary school as having learning difficulties, relating specifically to concentration. Learning support staff tried to investigate this discrepancy, using the procedures described above. They also enlisted the help of the educational psychologists but were still unable to reconcile the conflicting sets of evidence. The pupil, however, was given the benefit of the doubt and invited to participate in the technology course, which we describe later.

Mainstream and learning support teachers perceived that a major need of more able pupils was to work with others of the same intellectual ability. If they did not receive this opportunity, staff thought that they would become isolates or that their performance level in the class would fall to match that of their peers. The underachievement of more able pupils in the mainstream classroom was viewed by the learning support teachers as a significant problem. This occurred, they suggested because the teachers had lower expectations of the pupils than they were capable of achieving.

Like the identification of pupils with learning difficulties, teachers did not rely on one source of evidence to identify the more able pupils, nor did they regard such evidence as conclusive. Rather, it was used to try to build as complete a picture of the their needs as possible.

Meeting the Needs of the More Able in the Secondary

Staff in the case study school tried to meet the needs of more able pupils in three main ways: seeking ways of providing enrichment or extension within the curriculum, providing a technology course for the pupils within the school and enabling the pupils to gain access to specialist tuition outwith the school. In contrast with the view of the pupil with learning difficulties, in which they were regarded as having particular **deficits**, the more able pupil seemed to be perceived as having a degree of **unlimited potential.** The implication here is that staff were not imposing a ceiling of achievement upon these pupils, perhaps because they did not know the true extent of their abilities. Furthermore, the mainstream curriculum was seen by staff to be **limiting** these pupils, by providing them with goals which were constraining, rather than enabling. As well as observing the benefits to the pupils, learning support staff and senior management suggested that the status of the learning support department within the school had been enhanced as a consequence of attempts to address the needs of the more able.

Enrichment of the Curriculum

The learning support teacher in the case study secondary school with responsibility for the more able pupils worked with staff in a number of departments to produce differentiated learning materials designed for the more able. Whereas, in trying to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties, staff would provide the pupils with highly structured tasks, more able pupils would be given tasks which were less directive. This seemed to be intended to enable them to exercise their own creativity. They would also be expected to obtain information from a variety of sources, whereas pupils with learning difficulties were given more structured sources of information. Staff involved in the production of these materials said that the outcomes had been very effective and that the pupils had responded with enthusiasm to the challenge which the materials had provided. The paucity of comments on the effectiveness in meeting the needs of the more able pupils in terms of the realisation of goals, however, perhaps stems from their tendency not to place a ceiling on their achievement.

Mainstream staff and learning support staff said that it is often necessary simply to 'let go' of the more able pupils, in order that they may achieve success, even if this is unrelated to the teacher's mainstream goals. For example, a modern studies teacher reported that a group of more able S3 pupils had developed the idea of working with more able S1 pupils in computing with a view to producing an article for the school magazine. The teacher was quite happy to let the pupils go ahead and organise this, seeing it as a way of creating opportunities for them to attain goals beyond those for the generality of the class:

> I'm quite happy to see them go off at a tangent as long as they can see an end to it. I don't mind if the goal posts have shifted as long as they're at the same end of the pitch - kicking the ball in the same direction.

A homework survey, undertaken within the school by the learning support teacher, revealed that there was very little extension of the more able in homework tasks set by mainstream staff. This was because much of the homework set was of the 'finish at home' variety with the more able having little or none to do and the pupils with learning difficulties having the most. As a consequence, attempts were made throughout the school to provide homework which is differentiated for the more able pupils as well as those with learning difficulties. This again involved providing tasks and sources of information which were structured to varying degrees.

One or two mainstream staff said that it is within the curriculum that the needs of the more able should be met rather than through any extra, specialised provision:

> We've got to make kids sufficiently interested to stop kids opting out, slacking or slowing down.

Other staff, however, argued that the demands on mainstream staff to meet the needs of all pupils in the class were considerable. As a consequence, they thought that the more able pupils continually underachieved, because their teachers were either underestimating what they could do or were providing them with tasks which were not sufficiently demanding. The provision of a technology course within the case study school was viewed as a way of providing greater opportunities for achievement.

School Technology Course

A five week technology course was offered by two mainstream teachers to a group of pupils who had been identified as more able. The emphasis on science and technology in the provision for more able pupils, with little or none on the arts was commented on by staff throughout the school. This seemed to have come about as a consequence of the particular interests of the staff concerned, rather than from any considered opinion of the most appropriate educational goals or the forms of knowledge for the pupils concerned. Jonathan (1986), makes the observation that an emphasis on science and maths is a reflection of the prevailing values in society:

> In spite of the recent broadening of the range of talents thought worthy of attention, the emphasis worldwide is heavily in the cognitive domain, and more specifically in the areas of science, maths and problem-solving

> abilities. 'Superior individuals' are necessarily defined as those thought best able to serve the needs of the defining society.

The approach adopted throughout the technology course was practical problem solving, using Fischer-technik equipment. The staff running the course viewed this as more appropriate than trying to help the pupils to develop more advanced knowledge, particularly since the course had to be run on a twilight basis. The original intention had been to run the course in the afternoons but this had met with objections from other mainstream staff. This was mainly because the pupils would miss out on lessons, although one or two mainstream teachers had, it was reported, objected to the principle of provision for the more able, viewing it as elitist. Others, as we said earlier, argued that their needs should be met in the mainstream classroom. As a consequence the teachers, in a sense, had to compromise their educational goals for the pupils because they felt that they had to make it more like a 'club'. For example, they would have liked the pupils to have spent more time recording their results, but were reluctant to constrain them to do so because it was an after-school activity.

Access to Specialised Provision Outwith the School

The secondary case study school facilitated access to specialised provision for pupils who were more able in a particular area. For example, one pupil who was musically very able, was sent to classes at a major music school on Saturdays and was given the opportunity to practice in school at lunchtimes. More able pupils were also afforded access to national computing and mathematics competitions.

A 10-14 technology project for more able pupils was undertaken in the Region by a seconded Curriculum Development Officer in 1987/88 and a temporary technology unit was set up. Pupils identified by staff in their schools as more able were invited to attend the unit and were introduced to a broad programme of technology on one school day per week for ten weeks. The seconded officer has produced a report on the outcomes of the technology project for the Director of Education.

More Able Pupils in the Primary

We have very little evidence of any specialised provision for more able pupils of primary school age, apart from access to the technology project, described above. As far as the mainstream curriculum was concerned, a number of primary teachers said that the commercially produced learning materials did not challenge sufficiently the more able pupils. The SPMG materials, for example, merely allowed the more able to move at a faster pace, rather than providing more demanding tasks within the same level.

Regional Initiatives

Attempts are currently being made to establish a regional policy in respect of provision for more able pupils. This reflects the consideration of the needs of the more able which we have already highlighted. It also includes compensatory provision to offset disadvantages of remoteness, socio-economic deprivation, smallness of scale and reduced variety of provision.

Summary

Provision for more able pupils has been justified by invoking both individual and social arguments and by regarding such pupils as having special educational needs. In one of the schools, special provision was made for them, although not all mainstream staff were in support of this. The identification of the more able was based on both standardised tests and the mainstream teachers' identification in the classroom, but these were perceived to have some limitations. Attempts were made to meet their needs in the mainstream by providing appropriate learning materials, by providing a technology course in the school and by affording them access to specialised provision outwith the school.

In our final chapter we consider what has been achieved in the Region's secondary schools since the introduction, in 1983, of the policy on learning difficulties.

8

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this report we have endeavoured to focus on the three areas of research concern: identification of pupils with learning difficulties, meeting needs and policy. In this concluding chapter we take a more overarching approach with two strands. First, we return to our analysis in Chapter 1 of the framework set by the HMI report (1978) on *The Education of Pupils with Learning Difficulties in Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland.* We posed eight questions which asked whether the kinds of recommendations made by the report had been implemented in schools a decade later. In this chapter we reflect on the evidence from this research which is relevant to those questions. However, because we have no measures of how things were ten years ago, we cannot say how things have **changed**; we can only comment on how they are **now.**

Secondly, we review the three major themes which emerged from our study: the ways in which teachers conceptualised pupils' learning difficulties and, in particular, the circumstances under which they regarded them as temporary or enduring; the extent to which pupils with learning difficulties were expected to pursue the same curriculum goals as other pupils or were offered a 'special' curriculum within the mainstream classroom; and the nature of the role of learning support staff in view of the ways in which integration into mainstream provision challenged the traditional notion of 'remedial specialists' and 'remedial departments'. How these themes apply at various stages in the period of compulsory schooling is of particular interest.

Issues arising from the HMI Report 1978

The first question identified from the recommendations of this document was:

> Has the concept of what counts as a learning difficulty been broadened and applied to a wider range of pupils?

HMI had been concerned to extend the interpretation of learning difficulties beyond the basic skills of reading and computation to include problems of a conceptual kind. Attention was also given to the importance of addressing difficulties of a more transient kind resulting, for example, from a change of school.

In the primary sector our research suggested as many as 50% of pupils were seen as having some difficulties, but most of these were expected to be short-term and were often seen to be caused by 'slow starts' or poor 'learning style'. A wide range of problems in reading, language, conceptualisation, concentration and emotional, social or behavioural areas were identified and dealt with by both mainstream and learning support staff working collaboratively. There was considerable optimism that many of these problems would be resolved and few references were made to pupils being inherently slow or of low general ability. A relatively small proportion of these pupils were regarded as having enduring difficulties; these tended to be concentrated in the basic skills areas of literacy and numeracy.

Teachers from the secondary sector suggested that a smaller proportion (20%, in agreement with the Warnock Report) of pupils had learning difficulties. Relatively few were regarded as 'short-term' and of those that were, most were concerned with a failure to grasp particular concepts or to perform specific operations. Responsibility for dealing with them appeared to rest with mainstream subject teachers and, to some extent, with guidance staff rather than with learning support teachers. A much larger number of pupils within the 20% were viewed as having enduring difficulties, and these focused very clearly on basic problems of reading, writing, numeracy and spelling, and on notions of innate slowness and low levels of general ability. The pessimistic predictions about the possible resolution of these problems contrasted markedly with the optimism of teachers in the primary sector, particularly in the early years.

We would infer from this that the last decade may have seen a broadening of the concept of 'learning difficulty' among teachers. There is certainly now a recognition of the variety of problems which children may have, and an acceptance that even where these are of a short-term nature they have to be explicitly addressed.

Our second question was concerned with a broadening of the responsibility for pupils with learning difficulties as a policy of integration into mainstream classes was pursued.

> Have class and subject teachers and promoted staff collaborated appropriately with learning support staff in providing for pupils with learning difficulties?

Class teachers in primary and subject teachers in secondary schools were expected to become involved in the learning of pupils who traditionally might well have been left entirely in the care of remedial specialists. Senior management staff were also exhorted to be active in the co-ordination of the efforts to support those pupils.

Considerable efforts at all levels have been made to ensure that most pupils are integrated, in a physical sense, within mainstream classrooms. Co-operative teaching between learning support staff and subject or classroom teachers was found to be common; extraction of pupils from mainstream classes was relatively rare in secondary schools, but practised widely in the primary sector. We shall return to the roles of the two groups of teachers involved in co-operative teaching. For the moment, we will simply say that the majority found it to be of value, but there were some differences in how the approach was perceived by different teachers and in its operation between primary and secondary.

The third question focused on the development of procedures for the identification of learning difficulties.

> Have testing/diagnostic techniques developed to the point where they can identify a whole range of learning difficulties, indicate the specific kind of help required and avoid a sense of failure on the part of the pupil?

There was a clear concern in the HMI report that practice should move on from the use of standardised tests of basic reading and number to diagnose the causes of the learning difficulties and the point of their onset. Because the general thrust of ideas about the origins of learning difficulties had, by 1978, focused on the curriculum rather than on problems inherent in the child, diagnostic techniques implied analysis of the curriculum as well as assessment of the pupil.

Our research did not reveal any great advances in this area, though there was evidence of reduced reliance on standardised tests. Observation of pupils had been used but although such procedures were seen to be useful they were generalised and tended to encompass a deficit model of assessment. Views on whether pupils with learning difficulties were still experiencing a sense of failure were mixed and largely pessimistic. Although integration into mainstream classrooms, with the idea that curriculum goals are the same for all pupils, avoided the stigmata of the 'remedial class' and 'special curriculum', low achievement and special help within the mainstream classroom could engender profound feelings of being 'unsuccessful' within the pupil.

The curriculum itself was a major focus of HMI attention and criticism. The report was replete with ambitious recommendations which led to our fourth question.

> To what extent has the curriculum offered been able to take account of the demanding programme for development called for by HMI?

A curriculum with the same aims for all pupils, but opportunities for different routes or pace of working, was expected to match individual pupil characteristics and be interesting, challenging and creative. Activities were expected to focus on contextualised tasks, eschewing routine drilling and offering opportunities to experience success and promote self-confidence.

We have substantial evidence that teachers valued differentiated curriculum materials which allowed those with difficulties to progress at a slower pace. Commercially produced programmes were particularly evident in mathematics. Schools also endeavoured to produce their own materials which, in some cases, appeared to work well; in other cases, the lack of involvement of learning support staff in the early stages of planning was seen to lead to less effective programmes. Certainly we found little evidence of drilling and schools appeared to make every effort to provide contextualised tasks and equipment to aid, for example, those with writing difficulties. There is a long way to go, however, before a claim can be made that an interesting, challenging and creative curriculum for all has been achieved.

Attention was also focused by HMI on teaching methods and our fifth question was:

> Have teaching methods evolved to enable teachers to take account of individual differences among pupils in ways that promote the learning of everyone?

Although it was clear that the amount of whole class teaching should be reduced, and HMI were in favour of more discussion, group work, individual pacing and use of educational technology, specific recommendations on how such innovations might be achieved were sparse. It was largely left to teachers to decide on how strategies for differentiation within mixed ability groups (with a wider range of ability than in the past) might be conceived.

Co-operative teaching was almost certainly more prevalent when we carried out our research than when HMI undertook their survey prior to the 1978 report, and with more integration of pupils with special needs into mainstream classes, the teachers saw themselves as dealing with a wider range of ability than before. The use of differentiated materials had, no doubt, ensured that more self-paced work was in evidence. We have no findings, however, to indicate that more group work or discussion was going on. In the secondary sector, indeed, it was the availability of learning support staff to provide individual attention to those pupils with learning difficulties which appealed most to the mainstream staff. In so far as this role of learning support staff, together with differentiated materials, tend to promote individualised tasks and isolated ways of working for all pupils, whole class or group discussion (or other activities) may well be less in evidence than in the past.

In the primary classrooms, where there was less clear distinction between the expertise of the learning support staff and the class teachers (both, for example, were centrally concerned with the development of literacy and numeracy among pupils), co-operative teaching was essentially an 'extra pair of hands', particularly for language and number work. As in most primary classrooms, pupils tended to be organised into groups, but the work was not 'group-work' in the sense of a collaborative enterprise among pupils. At any one time a group might either be engaged as a (small) 'whole class' with the teacher, or dispersed to get on with 'individual' tasks while the teacher dealt with another group. The individual tasks provided an excellent opportunity for help from the learning support teacher on an individual basis.

The context for the differentiated teaching was to be set, of course, by the organisation of pupils including those with learning difficulties, into integrated classes. Our sixth question focused on this and the collaborative role of learning support and mainstream teachers.

> To what extent has the segregation of pupils with learning difficulties disappeared, and have learning support teachers been given the opportunities and resources to collaborate with mainstream colleagues?

The most important issue for HMI appeared to be the integration of those with learning difficulties into mainstream education and the wide range of activities it offered. They called for co-operation among teachers and for the provision of time to ensure such co-operation was effective.

As we have already indicated, in this Regional Authority non-recorded pupils with learning difficulties (as well as most of those with a Record of Needs) were educated within mainstream classrooms. We found few cases of extraction of pupils for remedial instruction in the secondary sector. Several primary teachers, however, indicated that this occurred for a few pupils from time to time in their schools. Their view was that this was necessary if the pupils were to achieve the required levels in, for example reading, that would put them in a position to aim for the same curriculum goals as their peers. Without that help, the resulting 'segregation by achievement' within the mainstream class at a later date could be much more damaging than would brief 'extraction' earlier on.

Gaining access to mainstream classrooms for learning support staff, particularly in secondary schools, was something of a one-way process. It was seldom actively offered by mainstream staff as an opportunity for co-operation. It was usually negotiated by learning support staff as a way of providing mainstream teachers with extra help. Indeed, in some secondary school departments the advances were unwelcome. Perceptions of learning support staff as lacking in specialised subject knowledge, and the concern to retain the individual teacher's privacy and autonomous control of the classroom, appeared important in these cases. The very best of collaborations were those in which the mainstream and learning support teachers jointly planned the teaching from the start. But that called for time and, furthermore, time when **both** could be free to discuss their work. This was rarely available.

As well as co-operation **within** primary and secondary schools there was the matter of communication **between** the sectors. This was the focus of our seventh question.

> Is there a full exchange of information between the sectors about pupils with learning difficulties and, if so, how is that information used?

HMI were ambitious in looking for information at the transition from primary to secondary which detailed the nature of pupils' problems and the sources of their difficulties.

We had ample evidence of efforts by secondary learning support teachers to visit the primary schools in their catchment area. Time, however, was scarce and multiple visits to the large numbers of associated primaries constituted a mammoth task; the advent of parental choice, under the terms of the 1981 Act, and so the potential involvement of even more primaries, made the task even less feasible. Primary schools clearly varied in the detail and quality of reports on pupils, from pen portraits to bald statements that pupils 'had learning difficulties'.

Primary-secondary liaison on these matters is not, of course, simply a matter of passing 'objective', and useful information from one institution to another. There are dangers that such information will be incomplete or biased, that it will endanger pupils' futures by engendering inappropriate expectations (positive or negative) among secondary teachers, and that primary reports will be influenced by the school's desire to avoid unfavourable comparisons with others in these days of institutional competition. Induction periods for primary 7 classes (in the June before transfer), direct observation of primary pupils in classrooms by secondary learning support staff during this period and systematic efforts by subject teachers in the early weeks after entry to the secondary sector are other important aspects of the collection of information at the transition point which complement reports from the primary schools.

Our last question was concerned with leadership functions for headteachers and the development of the activities of the 'remedial specialists' into innovative roles of learning support.

Reflecting on the list of tasks identified for learning support staff we asked:

> To what extent are these tasks reflected in the current practice of learning support teachers and how do headteachers undertake their leadership role in relation to the curriculum, vocational guidance and communication with parents of children with learning difficulties?

The prevalence of co-operative teaching, albeit not in all secondary departments or all primary classrooms, was evidence of learning support staff working alongside mainstream teachers. In the primary, the efforts were concentrated in the early stages, when optimism for resolution of the difficulties was greatest, and on basic literacy and numeracy. The class teacher's plans and goals tended to dominate, however, and the opportunities for learning support staff to contribute were largely confined to suggestions about the identification of pupils with special needs or areas of curriculum difficulty. It seemed that 'working alongside' did not indicate an equal partnership.

In the secondaries, circumstances were rather different. Here the subject teachers did not see themselves as having the same expertise as the learning support staff. They recognised the value of that expertise, but appeared to perceive it in much the same terms as that of the old 'remedial specialist' and valued above all the help which learning support staff provided for the relatively small numbers of pupils identified as having enduring learning difficulties. The role of learning support staff as consultants or as advisers on language across the curriculum was infrequently recognised. Similarly, their support for pupils with **temporary** upsets to progress was seldom sought – that was the province of mainstream (subject or guidance) staff.

In contrast with the mainstream teachers, the learning support staff in the secondary schools saw themselves as providing help to **any** pupil in a mainstream classroom. This was seen as an essential element both to establish their own credibility and to avoid the crude labelling of those pupils with learning difficulties. Furthermore, they set considerable store by their potential capability to **educate** as well as to **support** subject teachers, and displayed some frustration that such offers were often not taken up.

The involvement of learning support staff in the **planning** as well as implementation of work in subject departments seems to us to demand some priority. At the same time, serious consideration needs to be given to the question of how the specialised knowledge of these teachers can be most effectively used in ways which are not dependent on them having advanced subject knowledge.

Our evidence on the direct role and activities of headteachers in relation to children with learning difficulties was not extensive. Mostly what we have had to say related to the organisation of the school and its links with parents. Certainly the move to integration would not have been possible if it had not been facilitated by headteachers.

There were still relatively few structured opportunities for parents to air concerns about how their children's needs were being met. Even fewer were the initiatives aiming to involve parents in meeting those needs at home. This is not to say, however, that school staff (particularly the learning support teachers) did not go to considerable lengths to communicate with the parents of children with learning difficulties, but this was not always easy. Parents generally felt well informed and praised the approach of the learning support staff, but lack of opportunity for active involvement was apparent. While direct contact with individual parents and the organisation of parents' evenings clearly have value, it is important to consider how these channels might more effectively be used.

If the interactions between parents and schools require to be a continuing focus of attention, discussions between the psychological service and schools call for even more priority. Expectations of the psychologists and of teachers were diverse. If they are to move on from a situation in which the former constantly feel that unrealistic demands are being made upon them, and the latter continue to be dissatisfied with the help they receive, then some forum must be set up to discuss their mutual concerns and develop a shared understanding of what it is possible to achieve. The advent of 'area learning teams' within the Region, with the aim of developing collaborative approaches to the meeting of special educational needs, may constitute such a forum.

Issues arising from the research

So far we have summarised our findings in terms of answers to the eight key questions posed by the HMI Report (1978) on pupils with learning difficulties. In this final section we review three major themes which emerged from our study:

- what counts as a learning difficulty
- curriculum provision for pupils with learning difficulties
- the role of learning support staff in meeting the needs of pupils with learning difficulties.

These are central themes if the substantial progress already made in identifying difficulties and in meeting needs is to be sustained and developed. Although our study was carried out in only one Scottish Region, we hope our discussion of these themes will be of interest and use to teachers, educational psychologists and others concerned with alleviating learning difficulties. Our discussion is intended to provoke reflection and debate on current practice rather than to provide definitive answers to the many questions about the most efficient and effective way of identifying and meeting needs.

What counts as a learning difficulty?

We have already reported that many different kinds of learning difficulties were described by teachers and that there has been a broadening of the concept of 'learning difficulty' beyond a concern for literacy and numeracy to include areas such as concept development, concentration and behavioural, social or emotional aspects. What is striking, however, is the categorisation of such difficulties as **short-term** and therefore capable of remediation, or **long-term** and enduring. From this categorisation, we would argue, many things follow, the most important being the kinds of curriculum goals which are set for pupils, and the sources of help in overcoming difficulties.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, teachers in the early stages of primary were the most optimistic that learning difficulties could be overcome. This optimism was largely due to the inferred causes of such difficulties. It was accepted, for example, that young children develop at different rates and those who were 'slow in starting' would, with help, soon catch up. In addition, it was acknowledged that home background had a profound effect on children's development and that poor parenting, that is parents not encouraging their children to concentrate or to behave properly, could be responsible for initial learning difficulties. Thus teachers of the early stages believed that there were common standards of reading, writing, number, behaviour and so on which could and would be attained by most of their pupils. It followed from this, that extra help should be targeted at pupils experiencing difficulty as early as possible. Learning support staff were deployed overwhelmingly in these classes, the first four years of primary school, to enable pupils experiencing difficulties to catch up. Thus pupils in early primary were all set essentially the same curriculum goals. As we shall see below, the role of learning support staff was to provide the same kind of help as the mainstream primary teacher, to enable children to attain these goals. The distinctive contribution of the learning support teacher was to provide intensive help to children experiencing difficulties.

As children progressed through primary and into secondary, so optimism about difficulties being overcome began to decrease. This is not to deny that children in upper primary and lower secondary experienced learning difficulties. The important point was the categorisation of difficulties as short or long-term. We were told of a variety of short-term difficulties, such as in specific subjects or of personal problems leading to difficulties, experienced by children in these stages. The inferred causes of these short-term difficulties, the specialist subject matter or personal problems, meant that they were not seen as the province of learning support staff. Instead, particularly in the secondary school, subject specialists or specialists in dealing with the personal and social curriculum, namely guidance staff, were seen as the most appropriate sources of help. Pupils **continuing** to experience difficulties in reading, writing, and number work as they progressed through primary and into secondary were, predictably, viewed as experiencing **enduring** difficulties. The inferred cause of such difficulties tended to be that the pupil was generally slow, or of low ability. In our opinion, the suggestion that enduring learning difficulties were caused largely by pupils' low levels of innate ability, encouraged the provision of a special curriculum within the mainstream curriculum for these pupils. In general, the role of learning support staff was to help these pupils attain special (and lower level) curriculum goals.

In summary, teachers identified a wide range of learning difficulties. Widespread optimism in the lower stages of primary about the likelihood of overcoming difficulties gave way to pessimism in upper primary and secondary which was associated with the inferred causes of difficulty. Children experiencing **continuing** difficulty in basis skills, such as reading, writing and number by the time they were aged 10 or 11, tended to be seen by mainstream staff as having low levels of innate ability, and so the pupil rather than the difficulty became the key determinant of curriculum goals. By implication, the origin of the difficulty is seen as within the pupil rather than within the curriculum.

Curriculum provision for pupils with learning difficulties

Curriculum provision for pupils with short-term difficulties usually consisted of opportunities to practice a particular skill or operation such as the use of mathematical or scientific formulae. Sometimes intensive help was provided directly by mainstream staff or via worksheets to enable pupils who had been absent, for one reason or another, to catch up. Essentially, however, the curriculum goals for pupils with short-term difficulties, were the same as those for the generality of pupils. This was true of both primary and secondary provision.

In one sense curriculum provision for pupils with enduring difficulties was not differentiated. These pupils followed a mainstream curriculum in primary and secondary schools and extraction from mainstream provision was uncommon. In another sense, however, provision was differentiated. Mainstream and learning support staff made considerable attempts to reduce the impact of enduring difficulties on other aspects of learning. For example, curriculum materials could reduce the emphasis on reading skills by using pictures and diagrams, short sentences and large print. We saw both commercially produced and school produced materials which attempted to differentiate among pupils on the basis of their levels of ability. The teachers involved in preparing their own materials said that they intended all pupils in their class to 'learn the same content'. We discussed in chapter 4, the difference between 'covering the same content' and 'learning the same content'. In essence, it seemed to us that rather different curriculum goals were being set for pupils with enduring learning difficulties than those for the generality of pupils. More work is needed here, but in our opinion, it is unusual to find different methods being used to achieve the **same** goals. In many instances it may not be possible, even **in principle**, to use different means to achieve the same ends. Materials which differentiate in terms of process, for example, filling in blank words in a paragraph, writing a paragraph from scratch, or constructing a paragraph around key words, usually imply different attainment targets.

A curriculum with the same aims for all pupils but with opportunities for different routes or pace of working is, therefore, an ambitious target, especially if that curriculum is to be challenging, interesting and enjoyable. Whether it will be be fully achieved is doubtful, although this does not mean that efforts should not be sustained. Our research indicated that teachers were doing the best they could within the constraints of materials and other resources available to them. This leads us to our final theme, that of the role of learning support staff.

The role of learning support staff

In schools a great deal of staff identity and status is associated with subject or stage specific expertise. Secondary schools are organised around subject departments and in primary, teachers are identified through the age and stage they teach. A primary one teacher, for instance, is seen as possessing rather different knowledge and skills from a primary seven teacher. Even in areas with whole school functions, such as pastoral care, guidance staff seek to differentiate themselves from other staff by their specialist knowledge of pupils. Guidance staff typically have access to pupil records and information which is not routinely available to other staff. A key feature of specialisms is that people want to defend them and reinforce their particular skills and knowledge as distinctive. For example, in Scotland, teachers in secondary schools are registered by the General Teaching Council as competent to teach in specific subjects; a history graduate cannot teach science. Similarly in other professions, specialist roles and responsibilities are stoutly defended. The recent furore over law reform which would have reduced the monopoly of advocates to appear in the High Court clearly illustrates this point.

A key issue of the specialist role of learning support staff has emerged from our research. Secondary mainstream staff readily acknowledged the specialist skills and knowledge of learning support teachers in helping pupils with long-term difficulties. Such a view fits in well with the notion of teachers within a school as a group with separate and distinct specialist expertise. Strikingly, however, learning support staff themselves did not want to retain this specialist expertise. They wanted to educate mainstream staff so that those staff routinely and spontaneously took the difficulties and needs of all of their pupils into account. Thus the more learning support staff succeed in their educative role, the more their specialist position is eroded and the more their long-term future as separate departments is called into question. Ultimately their most effective role may be as consultants and recent moves in some Regions to establish area learning support teams is perhaps a reflection of the importance which is being attached to this educative role.

The issue of the separate professional identity of learning support staff was also apparent from our research in primary schools. The specialist training of primary learning support staff encouraged them to perform a similar educative role to that of their secondary counterparts. However, primary learning support staff saw themselves as providing essentially the same kind of help to pupils with learning difficulties as the mainstream teacher. The main difference was that the help was more intensive and targeted. The key issue, then, is that of the long-term professional identity of learning support staff, given that they either want to spread their knowledge and skills (in secondary) or do not recognise themselves as possessing inherently specialist knowledge and skills (primary).

In Conclusion

To conclude, in the decade since the publication of the HMI report, (1978) *The Education of Pupils with Learning Difficulties in Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland*, we have seen substantial progress. The vast majority of pupils with learning difficulties are now educated in mainstream schools, in itself no mean achievement. In addition, teachers' consciousness has been raised about the need to differentiate among pupils while at the same time striving for the same curricular goals. There is still some way to go in achieving this ambitious target, but this should not detract from the considerable developments which have taken place both in identifying difficulties and in meeting the needs of pupils with difficulties. We have commented on the role of learning support staff and their almost exclusive concern in secondary schools with younger pupils with enduring learning difficulties. No doubt difficult decisions have to be made about the most effective deployment of these teachers. However, perhaps if we see the development of learning support teachers' role into that of consultants we shall see their deployment not only in S1 and S2, but S3 and S4 and even S5 and S6. Such deployment would, of course, involve their expertise being used to help students with short-term as well as long-term difficulties. It would require, therefore, a development of, but not too radical a departure from, their existing role.

REFERENCES

ATKIN, J., BASTIANI *and* GOODE, J. (1988) Listening to Parents: An Approach to the Improvement of Home-School Relations. London: Croom Helm

BASTIANI, J. (1987) Parents and Teachers 1: Perspectives on Home-School Relations. Slough: NFER-Nelson

BRENNON, A.*and* DUMBLETON, P. (1989) Learning Difficulties and the Concept of a Person. British Journal of Educational Studies Vol XXXVII, No 2, May

DENTON, C. *and* POSTLETHWAITE, K. (1985) Able Children: identifying them in the classroom. Windsor: NFER-Nelson

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE (1978) Special Educational Needs (The Warnock Report). London: HMSO

HEGARTY, S. (1990) Toward an Agenda for Research in Special Education Paper delivered to conference on Special Education. Stockholm

JONATHAN, R. (1986) Giftedness and Education. University of Edinburgh

McALPINE, A., BROWN, S., McINTYRE, D. *and* HAGGER, K. (1988) Student Teachers Learning from Experienced Teachers. SCRE Project Report

MACBETH, A. (1989) Involving Parents: Effective Parent - Teacher Relations. London: Heinmann

MOON, B. (1989) Opening out Schools in ROAF, C. *and* BINES, H. *Needs, Rights and Opportunities: developing approaches to special education* . Lewes: Falmer Press

MUNN, P. *and* HOLROYD, C. (1989) School Boards: Early Experiences. SCRE Project Report

SCOTTISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (1978) The Education of Pupils with Learning Difficulties in Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland. Edinburgh: HMSO

SIMPSON, M. (1989) English Language Performance of Pupils at Primary Four, Primary Seven and Secondary Two. Northern College of Education

THOMSON, G., RIDDELL, S. *and* DYER, S. (1989) Policy, Professionals & Parents: Legislating for Change in the Field of Special Educational Needs. University of Edinburgh

TIZARD, B. *and* HUGHES, M. (1984) Young Children Learning, Talking and Thinking at Home and at School. London: Fontana

REPORT OF THE WORKING PARTY ON CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES (SUMMARY)

The report was presented to and approved at the July meeting of the Education Committee in 1983. The remit of the Working Party was as follows:-

i. to prepare a report for the Education Committee, with a view to the production of an agreed policy in respect of children with learning difficulties.

ii. to establish a procedure whereby the Authority complies with the Education (Scotland) Act 1981 (Children with Special Educational Needs).

There were, in addition, four sub-groups reporting to the Working Party, each sub-group with its own specific remit:-

Sub-group 1

To look at the assessment, placement and review procedures of children with special educational needs, and to pay particular attention to Recording Procedures as prescribed in the Education (Scotland) Act 1981.

Sub-group 2

To review the educational provision for children with profound and severe learning difficulties, including pre-school home visiting teacher services and further educational provision for students with special educational needs.

Sub-group 3

To review the provision of remedial education in the primary and secondary education sectors, including the educational provision for physically handicapped children in mainstream schools, the peripatetic teaching services for hearing impaired children and an examination of the educational provision for children with moderate learning difficulties in special schools and units.

Sub-group 4

To review the educational provision for maladjusted and psychiatrically disturbed children, including an examination of the use of List G Schools, Closeburn Assessment/Treatment Centre, Elmbank School, Crichton Complex of Schools and the development of withdrawal units in mainstream secondary schools.

The main recommendation was that children with learning difficulties should, where possible, be educated in mainstream schools, this to be achieved by offering a common course through mixed ability teaching, replacing remedial departments in secondary schools. New roles for learning support staff in the primary sector encouraged team teaching and learning centres in mainstream schools and replaced special schools and units. To underline the removal of any distinction between the special child and the remedial child, there was introduced one single designation of learning support staff, "Teacher of Children with Learning Difficulties".

Note

Over the last seven years the policy has evolved and whilst there has been a proliferation of learning centres many children with Record of Needs are now placed independently in mainstream schools. The Director of Education has re-convened the Working Party with a view to recognising the changing practices. There is no doubt that the research conducted by SCRE will help guide the deliberations of the Working Party in their identification of improved working practices.